





THE HOPE OF OUR CALLING

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
I THE HOPE OF OUR CALLING	9
II THE HEREAFTER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT .	29
III DEATH, BLESSING OR CURSE?	41
IV THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST	57
V THE SPIRITUAL BODY	73
VI JUDGMENT TO COME.	89
VII THE HEAVENLY WORLD	107
VIII THE HEAVENLY LIFE	123
IX THE HEAVENLY SOCIETY	139
X IS EVIL ETERNAL?	155
XI ETERNAL LIFE	173

I: THE HOPE OF OUR CALLING

I

THE HOPE OF OUR CALLING

“Ye are called in one hope of your calling.”—Ephesians iv:4.

SOME time ago, in the days before the war, a German theologian prophesied that the hope of immortality would count for less and less in our religion, and would ultimately disappear. And it must be admitted that this forecast seemed to be in accord with the general trend of thought and interest. It is true that no ground of reason on which men have been wont to base this hope has been rendered untenable, and that no new fact has been discovered that discredits it; the contrary, as will presently be shown, is the case. It is true also, that the results of the most recent scholarly study of the Scriptures point entirely in the opposite direction. Especially is it the case that a more searching and realistic investigation of the Gospels than they had been before subjected to, shows that the eschatological element in the Life and Teaching of Jesus is not anything secondary, but is fundamental and pervasive to an extent which had not been apprehended. So much so, that a veteran and prince among New Testament scholars, Dr. Sanday, is

found acknowledging that he had not "until lately adequately realized how far the centre of gravity of our Lord's ministry and mission lay beyond the grave." Whether the results of this closer historical interpretation will in course of time filter down into popular thought, and if they do, in what form and with what effect, remains a question. Meantime it is beyond question that for at least a generation the hope of immortality has been counting for less and less in our religious life. The majority of people, no doubt, retain the traditional belief in a future state of existence; but it does not grip, it scarcely interests them; at most it ministers a vague consolation in time of bereavement. And the same thing has come to be true of those for whom religion is more vital, and of the Church as a whole. Before the outbreak of the war sermons whose keynote was the life everlasting were comparatively seldom heard from our pulpits, and there was no more neglected section of the hymn book than that on the Last Things.

Nor is it difficult to account for this. A prolonged period of peace and prosperity, when progress in every department of activity seems to be constant and almost automatic, and the near horizon is bright with dazzling possibilities, is not one in which the vision of eternity is apt to grow most vivid. "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years" tends to become the utterance, not of a besotted individual, but of the collective mind. Another and more creditable cause is the new em-

phasis which in this generation is laid upon the social aspects and applications of Christianity. Human progress never succeeds in keeping to the *via media*; its advance is always by zigzags. We seem incapable of doing justice to one interest without doing injustice to another. So it is now. There was a time when the conception of the Christian salvation was far too exclusively that of dying in the peace of believing and going to Heaven. But we have changed all that. Social reform rather than the "salvation of souls" is our watchword; and the most earnest religion we have is more intent on getting things put right here and now than on any future Kingdom of Heaven. And how much, how very much, there is that is wholesome, how much to be thankful for, in this reaction from an excessive individualism and other-worldliness!

Yet, if we will listen to the teaching of history we shall be aware of the peril that attends all such reactions. We shall learn that in the Body of Truth no member can suffer neglect without injury to the rest; we shall take warning that we can never remedy one defect by creating another. And the question this sermon is intended in the first place to raise is, whether apart from the conviction of personal immortality—if we believe that this present state of existence contains all there is, *not only for ourselves but for all men*—it is possible to possess any ideal for the indi-

vidual life, or any hope for human society, **that** can be called stimulating and satisfying.

We ungrudgingly admit—or, rather, gladly assert—that there are men who with no hope beyond the grave live noble, self-denying lives, who show an enthusiastic interest in all that concerns the welfare of their fellow-men, who are willing to spend and be spent, to labor and suffer, and even die, (as many have done in the present war) merely that those who come after them may find the world a better place. Nor is it to be thought that any of us must live ignobly, although we believed that life would end next week. Right is always right, and wrong unalterably wrong; and in that faith, even if all things human end in death, we should have to live as best we might. But that “best” would not be well. For we are saved by hope. We are so made that we cannot act in the present and for the present only. To say that we are rational beings means that we act with an outlook upon some future near or far. We sow in hope that we shall reap, or that others will reap. The permanence of any fact, either in itself or in its consequences, is an essential factor of value; and while moral ideals have an absolute value—the value of right depending on nothing else than its rightness—yet an ideal to be a fact at all, must have *being*. And the ideal has being only in minds; and if all the minds whose ideal it is cease to exist, not only its existence but every trace and memory of its existence must be obliterated.

We may say that to do right is at any rate eternally right; that, whatever happens, it will always be a fact that we made the right choice, and that this fact will enter somehow as a component into the general sum of human things; but if that general sum is finally nothing, what value remains to its components? We may say that the past is never dead but lives still in the present and will live on in the future; but if a time shall come when for humanity there is no present and no future, but only a past that is absolutely gone, which there is nothing to recall and no one to remember, can it be said that anything done in it is a fact of imperishable value? It must be admitted at any rate that it makes practically a vast difference whether one is convinced that the right choice he makes, it may be in the face of sore temptation, is destined to bear permanent fruit in his own and in other lives, or that all fidelity, all striving after purity and goodness, will in the end leave no trace anywhere. The truth is that we are saved by hope; that all men who live nobly and fight the good fight do so because they believe that their action will bear fruit in some future far or near. They have thought out matters so far, and it is only so long as we do not think them out to the end that we can ignore the hope of personal immortality.

For what is the substitute which a popular school of modern thought offers for this? It is the contribution each of us can make to the future

progress of the race, that we may live on in other lives made better by the fact that we have lived. If we must feed our minds on a future, it is far better to set our hearts on doing what we can in our brief day to make life better for those who are to come after us, than to hanker after the continuance of our own petty personal existence. We ought to remember, as it is often said, that though God buries the workman, He carries on the work, and that it is the work, not the tools, that is the important thing. But this is merely to evade the ultimate issue. One would like to know how God is going to carry on the work when He has buried all the workmen; and, moreover, what the "work" is He is going to carry on (believing with St. Paul that "we are His workmanship"). Those who rest in this position assume the immortality of man, though not of men. They contemplate the permanence of the human race. But how, one would again like to know, without individual immortality can there be an immortality of the race? Modern science dispels any such dream. "Till a period within the memory of men now living it was possible to credit terrestrial life with an infinite future, wherein there was room for an infinite approach to an unpictured perfection. It could always be hoped that human efforts would leave behind them some enduring traces which, however slowly, might accumulate without end. But hopes like these are possible no more. All terrestrial life is in revolt against the second law

of thermodynamics (the degradation of energy); but, to it, in the end, must all terrestrial life succumb." (A. J. Balfour, *Theism and Humanism*, pp. 90-92.) If the physical history of this planet is allowed to run out its natural course, there will one day be a last man; and if there is no life beyond, with his expiring breath humanity will be extinct; all its history of mingled good and evil, its sins and heroisms, its aspirations and struggles, will have gone down into the grave of everlasting nonentity. It seems a fine thing to say: What matters if I pass? let me think of others. But these other lives have become petty and insignificant as your own. Try as you will to obtain firm footing, all is sinking sand. Human griefs and human happiness, human right and human wrong, all are ephemeral as the itching of your eyebrow. There is no escape from the ultimate issue. If the life of the individual is only "a momentary taste of being, from the well amid the waste," then all human history is but the "phantom caravan" which at last reaches "the nothing it set out from." In Plato's phrase, all things are spent on death. Could any creed be more paralyzing, if its implications were realized? It is because they do not think matters out to the end that those who deny the hope of immortality can endure the denial.*

* There are exceptions to this statement, but they are of such a kind as only to emphasize its general truth. One who has honestly faced the final issue writes: "Only on the firm foundation of un-

But the tragic events of the times in which we live are compelling us so to think, and to-day the Hope of the Gospel is nearer and dearer to multitudes than ever before. Not that the war with its colossal sacrifice of human personality in any way strengthens the case for immortality; but it brings the alternative home to us with a poignant intensity. When men, obeying the call of duty, are cut down in thick swathes long ere the scythe of time had any claim upon them, their powers still in the green blade, their dreams and ambitions unrealized, their work apparently undone, if this were the end, then what is man? His beauty is consumed like the moth; his days are like unto vanity. We feel the tragic incompleteness of these young lives; and then we feel the incompleteness of all human life, feel that it cannot be a circle closing us in, it must be a path leading elsewhere. It is so manifestly a fragment, a beginning, a sowing-time of which the full harvest must be hereafter.

* * *

To reach an assurance so greatly to be desired men have followed various paths. There is the path of spiritualism, of actual communications from the departed, demonstrating to the senses the fact of their survival beyond death. But without affirming or denying or committing myself to any opinion about the reality of such mani-

yielding despair can the soul's habitation hereafter be built."'
(Hon. Bertrand Russell, *Philosophical Essays*, p. 60.)

festations, I may express the conviction that, while they may in certain cases confirm belief in personal immortality, they can never originate it. It is safe to assert that no one has ever come really to believe in a future life because he has seen a ghost or heard mysterious table-rappings. It is the belief that makes these communications from the unseen credible, if they are credible, not *vice versa*.

There is the path of philosophical speculation, the path of Plato and his successors, who have reasoned, and perhaps reasoned well, that the soul is by its very nature indestructible. But the metaphysical proof will never lead, will never at any rate lead the ordinary man, very far.

We get further, perhaps, by the path of simple instinct. There is something in most of us that naturally revolts against the "cold obstruction of the tomb." Even a seasoned agnostic like Huxley acknowledges "I do not relish the thought that in 1900 I shall have ceased to be, as completely as in 1800 I had not begun to be." But the instinct is not universal; and in many of those who do possess it, its potency is strangely variable. Nor does it always point forward to a personal immortality; with a large section of the human race it takes the form of a longing for absorption, the merging of all self-identity, in the unconscious depths of Eternal Being. But granting the existence and power of the instinct, the question arises whether it is to be trusted; and

that is part of a larger question. Is life on a rational basis? Does the Power that has made us what we are, whatever that Power is, mean something by it, and is it to be trusted to finish what it has begun? Is there in human life and history a purpose that is marching on, and is that purpose wise and righteous and good? Can we be assured that whatever would be most blessed and good, were it true, must therefore ultimately be true? These questions resolve themselves into one question—Is there a God? Ordering and pervading all things, is there the will of a rational, righteous and loving God?

Wherever the most vivid, operative, fruitful faith in personal immortality has been reached, it has been reached by the path of religious faith and held with the certainty of religious experience. The most striking illustration of this fact, that faith in God, a God who is almighty and good, holds within it the assurance of immortality (even if only in the germ), is found in the religion of the Old Testament. The gropings and struggles by which Hebrew faith advanced from the dreary belief in the ghost-life of Sheol to the exultant certainty, "He shall swallow up Death in victory" is the most impressive picture in the spiritual history of mankind of the necessity the human soul is under, in its highest and best moments, to believe that the present world does not furnish a satisfying ideal of human life, nor fulfil the purpose of one who can be fully trusted and

adored as God. At first Israel had scarcely any ideas about the future, and those it had it shrank from in horror. But Israel had God, and that was everything. Its faith in God was greater and richer than it knew (as ours, too, may be greater and richer than we know), and among its stored-up treasures, which it needed centuries of the teaching of experience and the guidance of the Spirit to bring forth, was the hope of immortality. "Like Bunyan's pilgrim, the faith of Israel unconsciously carried the key of Promise in its bosom even when it was in the dungeons of Giant Despair."

And so it is still. If the great hope is to be more than a theological dictum or a comatose religious tradition, if it is to be a truth that is quick and powerful, touching experience at many vital points, influencing the whole outlook upon life, not an unrealized asset but a true soul-possession, it is still along this same path of faith and experience that it must be won. The hope of personal immortality stands or falls with faith in a personal God, and the realization of what that implies.

To believe in God is to believe in the *rationality* of things. And, let it be said once more, if life leads only to death, and the whole stream of human history, carrying in it the life-blood of all the generations, vanishes at last in the abyss of final nothingness, it is most like an idiot's tale, "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." But this pessimistic conclusion we cannot seriously enter-

tain. We cannot soberly believe that we ourselves are a product of irrationality, and that this world in which we live is the result of accident. There is too much good in it for that, too much wisdom, beauty and goodness, too much happiness and love. But if we are sure that this is God's world, that it has emanated from a Being who is wise, and just and good, we must be equally sure that it is not God's best world—there is too much evil in it for that, too much that is imperfect, discordant, disappointing.

When we contemplate our own nature we find that we are made with capacities to which the present life never has been and never can be adequate. Such is our capacity for *happiness*. To the most fortunate in circumstances, to the most fervent in piety, there come dreams of a happiness beyond anything that has been or ever will be experienced in this life. There is in us a capacity for *truth* which points beyond the limits of our present state. The quest for truth has been laid upon us, we know not how; and the further we advance in this quest the further off does the goal appear. Those who know most know best that they have but touched the fringes of knowledge; and there is in us all an instinct which rises up to welcome the assurance that many things we know not now, we shall know hereafter. Deeper still, there is in us an inextinguishable capacity for *goodness*. If we know that we are capable of being far happier and wiser, we are

still more conscious that we are capable of being far better than we are or are ever likely to be in this life; for, again, it is those who have advanced furthest in the pursuit of goodness who also see the greatest distances still to be traversed, and to the very end are forgetting the things behind and reaching forth to those that are before. There is in us a capacity for *service* which this life never exhausts. "The petty done, the undone vast," is still the cry of our struggling, aspiring humanity; and it is not easily conceivable that the vast powers for service personalized in a Paul, a Luther or a Lincoln are forever dissipated because a heart ceases to beat. There is a content in such personalities that is never fully expressed in their work. If life is on a rational basis the words, "faithful in a few things," demand the sequel, "be thou lord over many things." And *love* stretches out both hands across the gulf of death. It revolts against the suggestion that all we have learned and suffered and meant for others, and all that others have learned and suffered and meant for us, is suddenly to be ended by the guillotine of death. To know that every hour that binds us more closely to each other, that makes us more fit to love and be loved, is only a step towards love's extinction, would rob us of any belief that the scheme of things in which our lives are set is to be trusted. To suppose that we are endowed with such capacities for happiness, for goodness and knowledge and service and love, and that

when these capacities have been partially developed and we have learned a little how to live and have acquired some fitness for a place in God's universe—to suppose that just then we die and there is an end of us, is to suppose that God, if there is a God, takes the rough ore out of the mine, smelts it and changes it into fine steel, forges it into weapons for His use, tempers and polishes them, and then one day, in His caprice, breaks them in pieces and scatters their fragments to the void. "What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit?" The Psalmist's question goes to the root of the matter. To believe in God is to trust the rationality of life, and to trust the rationality of life is to believe in the life to come. When the death of a British officer, killed in action, was announced to a brother-officer who had been long his friend: "——dead!" he exclaimed, "it'll take more than *that* to stop him. He'll carry on." It will take more than that to stop the career of any faithful life. We shall have the "glory of going on."

And to believe in God is to believe that there is an ultimate *righteousness* in things, that there is a moral order, a conscience in the universe, which distinguishes between right and wrong, and reacts upon the right-doer and the wrong-doer, according to their character. It is said by critics of the doctrine of personal immortality that the important thing is, not that we should survive, but that the things we care for shall survive, *that*

these are valued in the universe on the whole as they are by us. But one of the things we thus care for is justice. A universe without justice would be an irrational universe; a radically unjust universe would be an infinite crime. We have a deep conviction that the ground-law of the universe *ought to be* such as will vindicate the right and every one who is faithful to it; and by equal necessity redress the wrong and meet the arrogant and impenitent wrongdoer with the full force of its antagonism. But certainly this conviction is never fully justified in the present world. If it is true, as doubtless it is, that "history has a nemesis for every crime," in probably a majority of cases, it is not upon the perpetrator of the crime that its nemesis falls. If it is true that "the history of the world is the judgment of the world," that is a text on which it is often possible to preach that "might is right" as plausibly as that "right is might." The moral order demands another stage than that of this world for its full development. If Christ and Herod, Paul and Nero, if the criminals who have brought this cataclysm of war upon the world—if they and their helpless victims and their heroic resisters drop through the trap-door of death into the same unawakening sleep; if any man can shuffle out of the consequences of his deeds simply by dying, as all men must, existence is built on no principle of righteousness. The sufferings of innocence, the frequent impunity of wrong, callous selfishness

flourishing, love trampled upon and crucified—Dives eating the fat and drinking the sweet, Lazarus rotting at his gate—these are facts of this life, and if the Power who conducts the world is to be called righteous, there must be other facts beyond. The criticism, that this belief in the ultimate righteousness of things means on the one hand a desire to be paid for doing our duty, and on the other hand a thirst for vengeance, is merely unintelligent. To say that men are responsible if it means anything, means that they must somehow, somewhere, somewhen, respond. There must come a time when in the light of truth the hidden shall be made open, and the open revealed in its true colors, and all falsehood and self-deception wither away. This is as necessary for the wrongdoer as for the righteous; and without it life would, morally, lead to no conclusion at all.

But for those who accept the revelation of God in Christ, there is yet firmer ground. To believe in God is to believe not only in rationality and righteousness, it is to believe in a perfect and eternal Love at the heart of life. It is to believe in a love that is more than benevolence, a love that sets its desire upon each of us by himself and for himself, that is afflicted in our afflictions, wronged in our wrongs, wounded and grieved by our sins, that has gone to the Cross for us and sought us through the gates of Death and Hell. We are not ripples on the surface of an oceanic Absolute. We are not tools of a Great Artificer to be used

until blunted and worn out, then flung aside. We are not God's workmen whom He may calmly bury, relay after relay, provided that the work goes on. We are His children holding each a place in His love which no substitute can ever occupy, to whom He has bound Himself with ties which not even sin, much less time, can sever. If we believe in God by Jesus Christ, if to our souls the Love of God which is in Him shines in its own light as the Supreme Reality, we are on the surest foundation as regards the life to come. We need no spiritualistic manifestations, no far-fetched metaphysical reasonings. In Christ we have found God, a God whom frail, mortal and sinful as we are, we can trust, trust for ourselves, for those whom we love and for all men; trust for to-day and for to-morrow, for the great step into the unseen and for what lies beyond it, knowing that whatever unimaginable changes may be in store for mortals there, all of blessed and good each is capable of receiving He will ever bestow.

II: THE HEREAFTER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

II

THE HEREAFTER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

“If a man die, shall he live again?”—Job xiv:14.

IN beginning a series of sermons on the Future Life I wish to say that I have chosen this theme because of its practical importance. I am aware that with some, perhaps a growing number, the subject is not a popular one. The objection is taken that our vital interests and duties are here, and that it is unwise, needless if not hurtful, to occupy our minds with thoughts of a future to which, if it really exists, we shall be able to give due attention when we reach it. Meanwhile this world with its irrevocable opportunities, and with so much in it that needs to be put right, gives us enough to think about. This is apt to be called the “commonsense” view of the matter, but to me, I am bound to say, it does not appear in that light. As reasonably might one assert that a child ought to be brought up as if he were never to be more than ten years of age. To set the present life in the light of the hereafter is not to subtract the value and power of the future from those of the present, it is not even to add the one to the other, it is to multiply the one by the other.

It can never be other than a question of practical and vital importance whether death is our goal, and all life's labour and achievement and discipline without a meaning for anything beyond; all human history with its mixed good and evil, its sins and heroisms, its struggles and aspirations, only "the phantom caravan" which reaches at last the nothing it set out from, or whether it is advancing in accordance with an eternal purpose to eternal issues. It is a question to which the war with its colossal sacrifice of life has given a tragic intensity; but always it is a question that lies behind all other questions and touches human experience at every point in the most vital way.

I begin this evening with the Old Testament; and I do so for several reasons. First, because it is necessary to a proper understanding of the New Testament doctrine. Also, because to place ourselves back in Old Testament times and feel the weight of darkness which then brooded over the grave will help us to realize the vastness of the difference Christ has made. And then, again, because all is not darkness in the Old Testament. Gleams of hope, and more than hope, break forth and grow brighter and stronger as time advances; and in these gropings and strugglings of Old Testament faith towards the light we have the most impressive proof which the spiritual history of mankind anywhere furnishes of the necessity laid upon the human soul by its own highest and best experiences to believe that this world and this

life are not its whole inheritance, that they do not represent a satisfying ideal, nor fulfil the purpose of a good God.

To deal with the subject in broad outline, which is all I can attempt, it may be said that throughout the Old Testament we find belief in a future state. No more than the ancient Greek or Egyptian did the ancient Hebrew imagine that his existence wholly terminated when his body was laid in the tomb. But in this belief there was no consolation, no hope. There was continued existence of a sort, but it was existence in the realms of Death. The abode of the departed was Sheol, a vast gloomy region under the earth into which Death shepherded the generations of men, one after another. The pathetic variety of names by which it is described shews what it represented to the imagination of these early ages. It is the "pit," the "lower parts of the earth," the place of silence, the land of darkness and the shadow of death. There, in this shadowy, ghostly prison, the shades or ghosts of those who had once been the living continued a ghostly, futile existence, bloodless, voiceless, without strength, memory, knowledge or any energy of interest or affection, a weakened edition of their former selves, vegetating in dumbness and vacancy. If death was not extinction, it was the utter and final paralysis of life.

Sometimes, indeed, under a great load of trouble, men did look forward to this torpid after-life with longing, for there "the wicked cease from

troubling and the weary are at rest." But it was only when life was most intolerable that men could thus envy the peace of the dead. Beyond that "bourne from which no traveller returns" there was nothing that the heart should desire. To depart thither was to go down into silence, to be cut off from the "land of the living," from all the quick, warm, interests that give life its meaning and savour. "The living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything. Their love, their hatred and their envy are now perished."

But to the Old Testament believer bitterest of all the privations of Sheol, dreariest of its anticipations, was its separation from God. The most pathetic words in the Old Testament are those which express this despair of godly souls. The good King Hezekiah, as he looks death in the face, mourns, "I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world;" but saddest thought of all is this, "I shall not see Jehovah in the land of the living. The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day. The father to the children shall make known Thy truth. But Sheol cannot praise Thee; they that go down to the pit cannot hope for Thy faithfulness." Such was the belief about the hereafter during the greater part of the Old Testament period. Even men of the most fervent piety and lively faith shrank with repugnance from the prospect. They looked into these depths which Christ has flooded with light and saw nothing but gloom, "a stagnant sea which no

ripple of cheerful activity ever stirs, and on which God's Face never shines."

We still read part of our funeral scriptures from the Old Testament and always shall, because there is no music in all the world so fit to utter the pathos of man's mortality as that which comes from the Hebrew lyre. But when we listen to these sad-voiced utterances, and then listen to the rapturous longings of St. Paul to depart and be with Christ, or behold the glowing visions of the New Testament Apocalypse, in which we can almost gaze upon the white robes of the purified and the triumphant ranks of the victorious, we may ask how it was possible for those Old Testament saints, who had such a vision of God and such assurance of fellowship with Him, to rest in such a view of the future? The truth is that they did not rest in it. In their deepest feeling they often revolted against it. The Psalms, for example, are full of such revolt. Psalmist after Psalmist lifts his voice in protest. For God to suffer His people to go down into the pit was to rob them of their one opportunity of experiencing His love and faithfulness. "Shall Thy loving kindness be declared in the grave? Shall Thy wonders be known in the dark? Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" Nay, more, it was to deprive God Himself of their love and service. "What profit is there in my blood, when I go down into the pit? In death there is no remembrance of Thee. In Sheol who can give Thee thanks?"

The Psalmist's inmost soul rebels against the accepted belief—the cruelty of it, the sheer senselessness and irrationality of it. “What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit?” He protests against it, yet he accepts it. The time came, however, when Old Testament faith did not accept it even under protest, but driven forward by the facts of experience and strengthened by the Spirit of God rose above it and reached out after a better hope.

How was it then, that Old Testament faith, though it did not rest, remained so long at this point? To answer that question fully would be to undertake a complex study; but briefly this was due to three concurrent causes, three imperfect conceptions which Hebrew faith had to outgrow, and did, more or less simultaneously, outgrow.

The first was an imperfect conception of God. In its earliest stage the Hebrew conception of God was scarcely more than national. Jehovah was Israel's covenant God. He was not yet received as the one Living and True God, God of all the Earth; and still less could His presence and power be regarded as extending to the under world. But Hebrew faith was not to remain stationary at this level. There came to it the loftier and larger vision of Jehovah not only as Israel's God, but as above all the Righteous God. And as righteousness is everywhere righteousness, not of any land or people, but universally and eternally the same, so the God of righteousness must

be everywhere God, and alone God, the One God of Heaven and Earth, reigning also in whatever unseen realms of existence there might be for men after death. Sinners could not escape His hand even in Sheol; nor there could His people be beyond the reach of His love and care. He was not only able to save them temporarily from going down to the pit, He could redeem them from its power.

A second reason was an imperfect conception of the Divine Government of the World. For long men did not realize the need of a future life to redress the inequalities and injustices of the present. They believed, like Job's friends, that here, in the present life, good and bad alike get their full deserts, and reap what they sow. "Behold the righteous shall be recompensed on the earth; how much more the wicked and the sinner." But in course of time this position was felt to be untenable. Notwithstanding all the orthodox might say, it was plain that justice was not fully done on earth. Any one could see that in this world it is often the wicked and worthless who eat the fat and drink the sweet, while better people have a full cup of sorrow and adversity given them to drink.

A third reason was that in the early period religion was national, rather than individual. The religious unit, the object of God's favour and the goal of His purpose, was the People of Israel, the elect Nation. What though the individual Israel-

life passed away? Israel still survived; the Nation as a whole might still fulfil God's purpose and enjoy a full and satisfying experience of His faithfulness. God could bury the worker and still carry on the work. But with the decay and downfall of the Nation in the Exile there came a great advance to a more personal conception of religion. It was felt that true religion is a personal fellowship with God. This was especially the message of the great prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. "All souls are mine." A loving and righteous God does not care merely for the mass, but for the man; not merely for the work, but for the workman. Men are not God's tools, to be thrown aside when their use is past; they are His people, the sheep of His pasture, to whom He has bound Himself by indissoluble ties. And thus when Old Testament faith looked forward to the glorious Kingdom of God, in which it firmly believed, the question necessarily arose: What of those who had laboured and suffered for the Kingdom before its advent? What of the saints and martyrs of past generations? Were they destined to have no share in its triumph; or could their only share be that they had suffered and shed their blood for its sake? The answer was given in a new word—Resurrection. The righteous dead would rise again; they would enter into a blessed resurrection—life in fellowship with the faithful of all ages. The later Prophets triumph in this great and blessed hope. The answer they give to Job's question, "If a

man die, shall he live again?" is one of rapturous affirmation. "Thy dead shall live; thy dead bodies shall arise. Awake and shout for joy, ye dwellers in the dust." Such in brief outline is the story of the development of Old Testament faith in the Life to come; such was the path along which it advanced from the dreary belief in the ghost-existence of Sheol to the assurance that Death will be altogether abolished in the time of consummation.

"He shall swallow up Death in victory, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces."

It is an outstandingly wonderful example of Divine education, of the way in which God by the teaching of experience and the guidance of His spirit leads humanity forward in the way of truth. And what I now wish to point out is, that it is only by the same education and along the same path that any of us can come to a living and fruitful faith in personal immortality.

[The conclusion of this Sermon was substantially identical with that of the preceding one, beginning at the asterisks on page 16, to which therefore, the reader is referred.]

III: DEATH, BLESSING OR CURSE?

III

DEATH, BLESSING OR CURSE?

“The sting of death is sin.”—1 Corinthians xv:56.

Is death a curse, or is it a blessing? Considering it merely as a fact of nature, we must answer that it partakes of both characters. Nothing can make it other than the pathetic event over which the generations mourn; yet it is at once evident that, things being as they are, the death of the individual is a benefit or rather a necessity to the life and progress of the race. It is true that according to the teaching of the Bible death is due to sin; it is the “wages of sin.” We shall consider later on what that means; for the present let us observe what it cannot mean. It cannot mean that man, even if he were morally perfect, could ever have been intended to remain permanently in this terrestrial state of being.

Without death, existence in a small world like this would soon become a physical impossibility. Within a hundred generations the earth would not have furnished standing room for the descendants of the first man. Even from this elementary point of view we cannot but see a benig-

nity in death. Death does not diminish, it multiplies, boundlessly multiplies, the number of the living. It calls up fresh generations to the perennial banquet of existence. In a deathless world there could be no upspringing of young life, no infusion of fresh energies and ideas. "The torch of life instead of glowing with new fire as it is handed on by each generation to its successor would smoulder in the stiffened grasp of a single age." The rich warm blood of youth would never irrigate and vitalize the roots of thought and feeling. If we lived forever, the world would become frost bound as a Polar sea.

But not only for the race, for the individual too, for ourselves, the fact that we are mortal is of inestimable benefit. We complain that life is short; we know the pathetic thoughts and emotions that come flocking up around that fact; but who would not dread to have his life begin to seem long? We complain that the *enjoyments* of life are of brief duration, like "snow upon the desert's dusty face," which "lighting a little hour or two is gone"; but is it not this limitation that gives them their intensity? There is no earthly pleasure which, if it could be prolonged indefinitely, would not become utterly insipid. We complain that life is short for the *work* we have to do, that it is so often a race against time; but is not this better than that it should be a dawdle against nothing at all? Is it not this that gives the weight and impetus of concentrated effort by which alone any

work is ever well done? What hard task would ever be accomplished if we could always postpone it till to-morrow; if the student, for instance, instead of taking five years to his course might as well take fifty? We complain that death ravages our *affections*; but again does not the consciousness that we hold our loves and friendships on a tenure which is so limited and always precarious do much to deepen and refine them? Even as it is, we may be hard and selfish enough, God knows; but what would be the result if we had no reminder of mortality and never felt that we must love each other well while we may, because some day we must part? We complain that the *fashion of this world* passeth away; but if even with death staring us in the face we are, nine tenths of us, so devoted to material objects, how should we escape being utter worldlings, if we held these on a lease of indefinite continuance? Take away death, and in how short a time would the multitude of men lose all sense of the eternal!

Considered thus, death is no curse but a blessing. It is an inestimable advantage in every way that we are mortal; nor can we doubt that our days are rightly numbered, that God in His wisdom has assigned to our earthly life that normal duration which is best adapted to its activities and enjoyments as well as to its higher purposes of spiritual discipline and development.

Yet we feel that this is not the whole truth about death, nor the deepest truth. Death may be a

necessity, but it is a sad necessity; it may bring rich blessings, but it brings them through an un-blessed channel. Death is death; and we feel that we have never known what it is to live, how good it is to see the light and breathe the common air, to gaze upon loved faces around us and take our part in the great life of the world, until we have looked upon the face of death. In vain does the New Paganism glorify death, telling us that "nothing can happen more beautiful than death"; in vain does it speak of "delicate death, lovely and soothing death"; and bid us go forth to meet it with "dances and chants of fullest welcome." Poets may put what adjectives before what nouns they will, but death is not delicate, lovely, or welcome. Death is death, and it is not robbed of its sting by fanciful epithets. There is a famous picture by Watts—you may have seen engravings of it—of Love and Death. Death with bowed head and resistless stride, as if sent on his mission by some compelling power, is pressing in at the doorway of a home. The child, Love, stands with uplifted arm and eyes of anguished appeal, as if to stay the advance of the silent and terrible intruder. But we see that the child must be borne down by that foe; we foresee Love lying crushed on the threshold, and the home filled with the gloom of the "shadow feared by man." Nothing, no poetry, no philosophy, no religion will ever make death, as a natural event, other than what it is—death, the final bankruptcy of life.

So far I have spoken of death simply as a fact of nature. When we turn to the specific teaching of the Bible regarding death, we find that it both vastly deepens the shadows, and as vastly heightens the lights that fall upon it. The Bible does not view the death of man as merely a fact of nature, because it does not view man himself as merely a part of nature, like a tree or an animal. Man is spiritual, related to God, belonging to the spiritual world; and for man both life and death have spiritual significance. Man is made for participation in the eternal life of goodness, truth and love, the life of God; and for him death, the loss of that higher divine life, is such a death as nature knows not. It is not to fade as the leaves fade in autumn in order to make way for the fresh foliage of spring; it is not to lie down and be at rest when the day of toil has reached its close. No, in itself and without Christ, it is a curse—the uttermost of all curses; an evil—the sum of all evils,—a penalty and a doom—the sum and end of all penalty and all doom. Look at the vivid and terrible picture St. Paul here sets before us. “The sting of death is sin.” He represents Death as a venomous serpent, a monstrous reptile, which slays men by its sting; and the sting, the poisonous fang, with which it inflicts the deadly wound is sin. Everywhere, from Genesis to Revelation, the teaching of the Bible is the same. It is sin that brings us under the power of death. Death is the wages of sin.

Think of that for a little. Try to realize its meaning and its truth. Man does not live by bread alone. To eat and drink and breathe and work and rest is not life. All that we have in common with the beasts that perish. The true life of man is that which he has in common with the highest and best, with God whose image he bears. It is to think the truth, which is God's thought; to will the good, which is God's will; to love what God loves, to act as God acts—in a word, to have the Spirit of God; in another word, to have that life which we behold in its full stature and perfection in Jesus Christ. That is life. The Bible will not allow us, and, if our eyes have caught any vision of its truth, we shall not allow ourselves, to call anything else than that Life. And the opposite of all that is sin. Sin makes us think the opposite of what God thinks, and will the opposite, and love and act the opposite of what God wills and loves—makes us believe a lie, makes us will and love and act what is wrong instead of what is right. Therefore sin brings forth death. Just as a stream cut off from its source or a branch severed from the tree dies, so man separated from God withers and dies. Not his soul only or his body, but the whole man, all that constitutes the human personality. Death is the sum-total of all that results from sin and separation from God. It is death of the soul, death to all that is good and true; but it is death also of

the body, the physical counterpart of the soul. It is death here and death hereafter.

Such is the Bible's way of thinking. I am afraid that it is not very familiar to us; and it presents obvious difficulties. It is difficult to conceive of bodily death as a moral consequence, the result of sin. Yet it is quite clear that it is the death of the body St. Paul is specially thinking of here, when he says that the sting of death is sin. For what is the victory over death for which he cries "Thanks be to God"; what is it that extracts its sting and heals the mortal wound? It is the Resurrection of the body, that this corruptible shall put on incorruption and this mortal put on immortality. Then shall death be swallowed up in "victory"; for then all that death has done will be undone, and much more than undone. All that it has laid its defacing and destroying hand upon will be restored in imperishable and far nobler form. Yet, I say, there are obvious difficulties. I have spoken of the impossibility of supposing that man, even in an ideal state, could have continued permanently in this earthly mode of existence. And if St. Paul were here among us, we might ask him how the translation from the earthly to the heavenly state, the laying aside of the body of flesh and blood and the putting on of the vesture of immortality, could ever have taken place except through death or a physical equivalent to death. He is not here to answer the question, but if he had been, he might have

replied that he could not profess to explain this any more than he could explain the mystery of the Resurrection. Perhaps he would have been content to say that the transition into another state of being would not have had that character which death, as we know it, has. It would have been not so much death as simply birth into a higher state of being. Filled with the sure hope of everlasting life it would have been an entirely different experience, as it in fact does become a different experience to those for whom Christ has taken away its ghostly terrors.

That is at any rate the practical truth of the matter. In calm exultation of Christian faith we sing:

It is not death to die,
To leave this weary road
And 'midst the brotherhood on high
To be at home with God.

It is sin that does make it death to die. Sin is the thing that ought not to be, that has no right to exist; and it is sin that makes one unfit to live and makes it a moral doom to die. It is sin that makes death a penal thing to the worldly man, wrenching him away from everything that has been his life, his ambitions and possessions, his work and his enjoyments, pushing him out from the one world where his heart and his treasure are, dismissing him as to a foreign land, friendless and destitute. It is sin that makes death penal to the man who has a guilty secret hidden in his life, who

has foully injured some one, or done some of the things that leave on the soul the dark spot that will not come out. When such a man sees death near, like the criminal who feels the detective's grip on his shoulder, he knows that his hour is come. It would be a mistake however to suppose that this is the way in which sin commonly asserts itself as the sting of death. Those who carry a guilty secret to the grave are few. It is not so much what men have done as what they are, or rather what they are not, that makes death to be feared. It is the feeling that God is not their friend, that death is hostile and that what lies beyond it, if there is anything beyond, must be hostile too. It is the unspiritual man's instinctive dread of the unseen. The sting of death, that which makes it a moral doom, is sin. Has Christ taken away that sting for you and me?

For that is the final truth. Christ utterly changes the character of death. By redeeming from sin he delivers from death. He does not grant us escape from passing through that narrow door through which He Himself has gone; but He makes it for us, as for Himself, the door of life, the gateway of blessing. The transformation of death is one of the unending marvels of Christian faith. Outwardly death bears the same aspect. It comes in no gentler form, with no more obsequious mien. Yet how completely different is the reality! The cloud has become merely a background for the splendour of the rainbow. And

this is because Christian faith deals so honestly with the fact of death. It does not attempt to soften the harshness of its features; it does not tell us that "nothing can happen more beautiful than death"; it does not try to light up the valley of the shadow with any artificial glare. It deals in the profoundest way with the problem of death. It insists that the sting of death is sin. It is because we are not in harmony with God and the laws of the Eternal life that we are subject to the power of death. It is this that makes us always afraid of what lies in the unseen, afraid even of the unseen to-morrow, and most of all afraid of that great step into the unseen which we call death. And the Christian Gospel begins the work of our deliverance at the true centre, begins not with the problem of death but with the problem of sin, by reconciling us unto God, by giving us in Christ a God whom, sinners as we are, we can trust to the uttermost, trust in life and trust in death. When Christ takes away sin, when he sets us right with God and the spiritual universe, He takes away everything in death that is a curse and leaves only the blessing.

He takes away everything in the *past* that can make death a curse. It is no longer the officer of justice who, when long impunity has lulled the criminal into forgetfulness, lays a stern hand upon him and says, You are my prisoner. In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. The forgiveness of sins!

The past has no fatal claim upon us. It has no terror. The past can never separate us from the love of God. And Christ takes away everything in the *future* that could make death a curse. What is Death? A sleep and an awaking. A birth. Yes, that is what death is for Christian faith—birth into a greater, more perfect life. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” How blessed! It is they who are the living, we who are only half alive.

“The dead! Is it you who call us dead?

What! You who wait for the birth,

Who wait to pass hence from the prison of sense,

From the body and brain of earth?

Oh, why do you name the living dead,

Who think and act with the force

Of the light that from far, that from star to star

Moves on in its wondrous course?”

And Christ takes away everything in the *passage from the present to the future* that is a curse, Brethren, none of us can say much about that; we have never made that passage, nor heard that messenger's call. But we do know that if the messenger has a grim and ghastly look, it is the message of love he bears. We know that if there is darkness in that passage, there is a Presence there, and a Voice that says as of old, “It is I, be not afraid.” All this we know. We know that no life that has aught of Christ in it can ever die or suffer diminution, that for such a life Death is but the liberating angel who leads it forth to

higher powers and fuller opportunities. Yet death is still an ordeal, the last ordeal of faith. The flesh is weak; the instinctive dread is strong. Darwin tells how at one time he often visited the London Zoölogical Gardens, and, standing by the glass case which contained the deadly cobra, used to put his forehead against the glass while the venomous creature struck at him. The strong sheet of glass was between; there was no danger and he knew there was none; yet whenever the cobra struck he recoiled. Time after time he put forth his utmost effort to master this instinctive dread, but always it proved too strong for his reason and his will. It may be much like that with the Christian's attitude towards death. He knows that its sting cannot touch him; but natural instinct still recoils from the threatened stroke. Yet even this last remnant of fear is in a multitude of instances taken away; and death is met with the fervent energy of faith, with the welcome of one whose toilsome pilgrimage is ended and whose next step is into the rest and bliss of Home. Seeking the grace of Christ to live well, we may safely trust for the same gracious help to die well.

In the highest teaching of the New Testament, Life and Death are seen only as parts of one Divine whole. So also we have learned in these days to speak not of death, but of making the "supreme sacrifice." The great words of the New Testament speak to us with a new self-interpreting significance. He that loves his life loses

it. He that gives it gains it. Greater love hath no man than this, to lay down his life. Death is sacrifice, and Life lives only by sacrifice. The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ are the eternal proclamation of this; and every life that follows in His steps shall prove its truth. And though it may not be given to you and me to die what may be called the ideal death, to lay down all in one supreme moment, like the martyr and the soldier, it is ours so to follow Christ in His life of love and service that death shall only do for us what it did for Him—finish the work, perfect the sacrifice, and become the entrance into the Greater Life. The dayspring shall become the day; the seed cast into the ground bring forth its everlasting fruit.

IV: THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

IV

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that sleep.”—1 Corinthians xv:20.

WHEN the Gospel of Christ was first preached it collided with all human preconceptions by holding up to men as Saviour and Lord One whose earthly career had terminated in His dying a malefactor's death. The cross was to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness. It is true, I think, that to modern thought it is not the Crucifixion, it is the Resurrection that is the greater obstacle. We feel no difficulty where the early believers felt most difficulty, in the tremendous shame and sorrow and humiliation of the Cross. We feel the Divine glory of that—

Love that made the Lord of all
Drink the wormwood and the gall.

The difficulty with us is the Resurrection. Yet why should it be? Is it because it is a great mystery? But a fact may be utterly mysterious as to its nature yet utterly certain as to its existence and significance. What is there that is with-

out mystery? The tiniest thing you see, the commonest thing you touch has its mystery. You yourself are a mystery. Existence itself, the mere fact that anything is, is the greatest mystery of all. You cannot take any simplest fact of experience and try to think down to the root of it without having to confess that the existence we see and know is but the surface of an existence whose depths we cannot fathom. If we could understand the "flower in the crannied wall," "roots and all," we should "understand what God and man is." The growth of a blade of grass is a mystery, the result of an inscrutable power, no less than the creation of a world or than resurrection from the dead.

It is said, however, that resurrection is incredible because it is contrary to the laws by which existence is uniformly governed. But who can claim to assert this from an exhaustive knowledge of these laws? Suppose that the minnow in its pool, the frog in its ditch, knew the laws of the pool or of the ditch, would it be entitled thereby to pronounce the ocean-tides incredible? What we in our large way call the order of nature is only what we have been able to observe of the order of nature, and that only by means of our five senses. What lies beyond our present opportunities and powers of observation, who can tell? If we lived in a world where for a long period the population was stationary, where for thousands of years there had been neither birth nor death, in

such a world what a miracle either of these events would appear—antecedently how incredible! And I should like to know on what principles of reason we ought to hold it incredible that in some larger order of nature yet to be unfolded to our knowledge, resurrection—the changing of a mortal and corruptible body into a body that is spiritual and incorruptible and fitted for a higher stage of existence—is just such an event as birth is here, every whit as natural and no whit more mysterious. I believe that on the other side of the veil it is so that resurrection will appear—simply as the birth into the heavenly state of being.

But I must not linger on the threshold of my subject. My purpose in this sermon and the next of the series is not to deal with the credibility of Resurrection, but to exhibit its meaning; and to any who may be in difficulty let me say from my own experience that the first step towards assurance of its credibility is to understand its meaning.

In the first sermon of the series I endeavoured to explain the belief which was held in Old Testament times about the future state. There was a future state—a future life it could not be called. For good and bad alike there was only the dreary ghost-existence in Sheol, feeble and futile and without possibility of deliverance, existence in the realm of death. And we saw how Old Testament faith could not rest in this, but at last in the course of a wonderful Divine education attained

to a better hope. For in the heart of Old Testament religion there was always the unquenchable belief in the salvation of God—that God would come and not keep silence, that He would send His Messiah to establish the Divine Kingdom and to make His faithful people inherit it. And by and by the thought came—what of the suffering saints of God whom death had swept away in the past, whom death was even now sweeping away, before their eyes could behold that glorious advent? And with the question came the answer. God's Israel would not in that day mourn its dead sons and daughters. They would be raised up. The pit of Sheol would give back its prey to life and joy. Such is the belief as we find it in the latest writings of the Old Testament. And such is still the belief we find in the New Testament; with the difference, that Sheol or Hades, the region into which men go at death, was thought of as divided into two separate abodes—the one, Paradise or Abraham's Bosom, the resting place of the righteous; the other Gehenna or the "outer darkness," the place of retribution for the wicked and ungodly. Still, the one was not the everlasting Hell, nor was the other the final Glory. This was to be reached only at the Resurrection, when God's Kingdom should come in power. Such was the belief held in Our Lord's time, not universally, but certainly in the circles from which His disciples were drawn. When, for example, He said to Martha, "Thy brother shall rise again," she at

once concurred, "I know that he will rise again at the Last Day."

Let us try then to think ourselves back into the place of Our Lord's disciples and to conceive what their thoughts must have been about the after-life into which their Master had gone, when His body was laid in Joseph's tomb. He had sought to strengthen their faith beforehand. He had foretold His death, but also His Resurrection. "In My Father's house are many mansions," He had said, "I go to prepare a place for you." Their sacred fellowship would not be broken by His death, but only perfected. But when the black storm burst and the crashing blow fell, all this was forgotten and blotted out. If in the stupor of their grief they thought at all about His future, what would their thought be? They believed that they had found in Him the Redeemer of Israel; but He was dead. That had befallen Him which befalls all men. And after death that would befall Him which befell any good man when he died. His body was resting in the tomb; His soul, or shade, was resting and was comforted in Abraham's Bosom. He would rise again, yes, at the Last Day, when the Messiah came; but as for His being Himself the Messiah, the Quickener of the dead, that was a vanished dream. He Himself had become Death's victim, had gone away into the dim land of shadows, away from all communion with the living. This, as you may observe, is exactly the conception of the case which

is revealed in the conduct of the disciples after the Resurrection. When the Master so suddenly appeared in their midst, saying "Peace be unto you," their immediate thought was that, just as in that strange Old Testament narrative the shade or ghost of Samuel comes up from the underworld to visit Saul, so now it was the ghost of their dead Lord that had revisited them. And we read how He allayed their not unnatural fears. "Why are ye troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Handle me and see that it is I myself." He displayed to them the gashes made in His body by the crucifixion; He ate and drank in their presence. And we can see the reason for this. Had they been permitted to believe that their Master had reappeared to them as a ghost, that would only have confirmed their saddest thoughts. It would, indeed, have proved His continued existence, but would have precluded any possibility of hope in His power to save and to bestow eternal life.

But now he stands before them, He stands before all men, as the Living One, the vanquisher of death. He has carried our whole humanity, body and soul, through a world of sin; and sin has had no power over it. And now He has carried it across the gulf of death, and death has no dominion over it, has not impaired its powers or dimmed its light. Death has only raised it to a new power and transfigured it with a new glory.

We can now understand St. Paul's passionate

insistence upon the Resurrection of Christ as the centre of the Christian Gospel and the foundation of Christian faith. Only the Living One can give life; only He who conquered sin, and because He conquered sin conquered death also, can give to us the same everlasting victory. We can understand, I say, why the Resurrection of Christ was for primitive Christianity, the cardinal fact of its faith, the beginning of a new order of things in which God's purpose shall be at last fulfilled, in which good shall conquer evil, and death be no more than the portal through which life passes into life more abundant. But does it mean as much to us? Not in our immediate consciousness, perhaps. We who have twenty centuries of Christian faith and experience behind us can scarcely be so directly conscious as the first believers were that our faith in the Divine mission of Jesus rests on the fact of the Resurrection. The faith and the hope which that brought into the world have become so familiar, so much a common spiritual inheritance, that we are apt to take them for granted. We need to remind ourselves that whatever of Christian faith there is in the world at this moment has its historical origin in the Resurrection of Jesus. Had there been no Resurrection, Christianity had never been born. Try for a moment to think the Resurrection away. Suppose that Jesus had died and departed into the great silence, and that men had never known anything more about Him—the very

possibility of Christian faith, the founding of the Christian Church, the career of Christianity in the world, would be gone. At the utmost Jesus would have taken a place with Socrates or Confucius—higher, possibly, yet in the same category; but in all historical probability His name and memory would have been entirely blotted out; they would not have survived a single generation.

Our special enquiry this evening, however, is as to the significance the Resurrection of Christ has for our faith in and our knowledge of a future life. And in the first place it is the one positive and tangible proof that has ever been given of a life beyond the grave. I do not say that if Christ had not risen we should have had no belief in that life. We should have had, perhaps, the belief Plato had, which the Old Testament Saints had, which the Jews of our Lord's time had. We might—who knows?—have had a little more. But it is Christ who has brought life and immortality *to light*. What is the actual state of the case? Death is a fact, a certainty. Through that narrow doorway every man who has ever come into the world has gone out again. And beyond is—what? A silence out of which comes no voice, a darkness out of which shines no ray. When Columbus was seeking for the New World he saw one day strange birds flying overhead and pieces of vegetation floating on the waves, which he perceived were natives not of the sea but of the land, and knew that he was drawing near to the end of

his quest. But no sign ever comes to us from that world, no flotsam from its shores; no message by any kind of wireless telegraphy greets the voyager's ears. Not one of those who have gone before us, of those we have known and loved, has come back to tell us what is there. But now our Columbus has sailed back from the New World. As St. Paul says, the Risen Christ is the first fruits of them that sleep. He is like the first ripe sheaf of corn, the precursor of the full ingathering. "Earth had been sown thick with graves." Men had been but too familiar with that sowing. From age to age they had committed to the dust of death the fairest and the best they had; but there had been no sign of springtime or harvest. Christ is the first fruits of that sowing, the first disclosure of the wondrous secret. Death was a certainty, and till Christ rose the only certainty.

But now there is another. "Now," says the Apostle—and what exultation there is in that "*now*"!—"Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that sleep." He is the first ripe sheaf of corn from that great sown field, the pledge and the pattern of all that is to follow. By His Resurrection Christ has invested what was a guess, a dream, a speculation, a longing, a venture of faith, with an altogether new kind of certainty. By it we are begotten again unto a living hope.

Further, I ask you to observe this significance which our Lord Himself emphasized in the Resur-

rection: it is the guarantee of *personal identity* after death. "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself." "It is I myself," the same Jesus, your Master, Friend and Brother. There, I say, is what Christ's Resurrection means. It is what it meant to those chosen followers then. Neither was He a weak ghost of His former self, as they feared; nor was He changed into some remote, unrecognizable, celestial potentate. All that He had been to their trust and their love, He still was. Their fellowship was unbroken. My brethren, that is what the Resurrection of Christ means for you and me also. This I hold fast and will not let go: the Jesus who lives and moves before us in the Gospels—it is He Himself who lives for us in Eternity. The Master whom Peter loved I may love; and I may lean on his breast like John. He who took the little children in His arms and blessed them will do the same for my children. He who trod the waves can come to my succour in the storm with his word of cheer. He who was the Friend of Sinners will be my friend; and He will still pray for me, when I drive another nail into His Cross, that I may be forgiven because I know not what I do.

And this is what resurrection means, one at least of the great things it means, not only for Jesus Christ, but for all who partake of it. Against all theories of impersonal or only quasi-personal immortality the doctrine of resurrection stands for the persistence of individual self-

hood. We know how selfhood still endures through the most remarkable changes in this life. Thirty or forty years ago there was a certain chubby-faced child, and if you were to meet that child on the street to-day you would pass him by without a glimpse of recognition. If you look at him in some faded photograph, it is the face of a stranger that meets you. Yet, though physically, intellectually, morally, you are so different it is *you yourself* whom you see. Or one may meet a friend of long ago after many years, and "Yes, it is I myself," he will say. He may have grown fabulously rich or climbed the heights of fame, or he may be a needy tramp; he may have undergone a vast change of character, the bright youth may have become the hopeless slave of vice, or the moral weakling a man strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, the greedy man may have become generous, the hard man tender, the proud man humble; but though changed almost out of recognition he says, "It is I myself." The stream has flowed through changing scenes, with changing volume; its colour and many of its properties may have been changed by the soils which its current has absorbed and the tributaries it has received; but it is the same continuous stream. So shall it be in the last, greatest change, when the stream of life sinks out of sight in the Valley of the Shadow and emerges on the other side of the great mountains. That is why that change is called Resurrection. The new life

is the old life, all that is fairest and best in it, in new and nobler form. That indefinable thing called personality, with all its peculiar characteristics, that which we know in those whom we really know, and love in those we really love, will be unchanged. When we awake one morning on the other side we shall say, with some surprise possibly, "It is I myself," and some friend of old years meeting us will say, "It is I myself." Thus let us think of those who have left us; for I am sure that we are wrong, very wrong, if we put them out of our hearts and out of our lives. Here is the perpetual link which binds us to them and to that second half of life, as it binds us to Christ, the link of resurrection. They are themselves, though transfigured; all that was merely superficial and accidental, of the earth earthy, passed away, but all that makes them to be their very selves, remaining. In this, at least, Christ's Resurrection is the type and pattern of our own—"It is I myself."

And the Resurrection of Christ sends out rays which illumine faith and hope to their widest circumference. It reaches back into the dawn of history and forward to its eternal goal. It signifies and guarantees the eternal victory of the Divine Life, of good over evil, love over hate, truth over falsehood. And there is no other hope that can bear the tremendous weight of our needs to-day, when out of a shattered and broken world we look for some new thing to emerge, some bet-

ter condition, for which so fearful a price is being paid. The fourth year of the War slowly draws its clouds and shadows about our path. We never imagined that it would be like this. We knew that our cause was right; and therefore we trusted in God, as still we trust and shall continue to trust. We hoped that He would make bare His arm and intervene on behalf of the right; and He has intervened, I believe He has, again and again. But He has not intervened in the way we expected. We hoped for an intervention that would have saved us from vast sacrifice. But that has not been God's way. The servant must not be above his Lord. It was by the way of the Cross and Passion and then the Resurrection that Christ came to His victory and kingdom; and our hopes and prayers and efforts must follow in His steps, must be the hopes and prayers and efforts of men and women who are prepared to bear the burden, to tread the way of the Cross, to endure as seeing Him who is invisible and to go with Him all the way. And when for the time things are going none too well, and the end is not yet in sight, we have to steady ourselves, to look calmly without being staggered by the happenings of the moment. And, brethren, there is nothing that can so strengthen and calm us as to know that, come what may and come what will, *He lives*. Yes, Christ is being crucified in the world anew; and it is ours to take up our cross after Him and suffer as He did for the right.

And after this fresh crucifixion Christ will rise again. He will rise again in a better world, in which men will take His teaching seriously and try to serve God instead of Mammon, and selfishness will be at a discount, and the spirit of service and sacrifice will spread, as it has already begun to spread, in men's hearts.

We are still in the long way, and the turning has not yet come. But now is the time to realize that the help God sends us is likely to be just in that long way, yes, through its very lengthiness, by enabling us to endure to the end. He that shall endure to the end shall be saved. A Frenchman said a little time ago, "What desertion to the enemy is in a soldier, pessimism is in the civilian." But we are not going to be pessimists. Believing in the Risen and Reigning Christ, we are going to be brave men and women, and patient and hopeful; because we know that the things which are ultimately bound to win are the things which are good as God is good.

He hath sounded forth His trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat.
O be swift my soul to answer Him, be jubilant my feet—

Our God is marching on.

V: THE SPIRITUAL BODY

V

THE SPIRITUAL BODY

“But some men will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?”—1 Corinthians xv:35.

OUR subject this evening is one the bearing of which is not generally well understood; and it may help to clarify your ideas about it, if I tell you how my own have changed.

At one time I was much perplexed regarding the Resurrection of Christ. I did not disbelieve the fact; but I failed to understand why St. Paul should make the whole trustworthiness of the Christian Gospel turn upon it, asserting so passionately that, if Christ be not risen, our faith is vain and we are yet in sins. I believed, or thought I believed, in the immortality of the soul; and I reasoned that if the soul is immortal, Christ of course is immortal; and if we are assured that Christ lives in the spirit, our Saviour and King, what, I asked myself, was the supreme need of His bodily resurrection? It might be valuable, in the circumstances even necessary, as an evidence of His survival after death; but how could it be so central for Christian faith as the

New Testament everywhere makes it? I found that the New Testament everywhere teaches that for Christ, and for us too, the entrance to a blissful and triumphant immortality, the fulness of eternal life, is only through resurrection; but I could not see why, until I made the important discovery that the immortality of the soul as a separate entity is not a Biblical doctrine at all. It is a doctrine of Greek metaphysics which has somehow been grafted upon Christian theology. What the Bible teaches is the immortality, not of the soul, but of the *man*, the human personality, with all that essentially belongs to it; and what the Bible takes for granted is that the organism God has created for a human "self" is not body or soul, but body and soul in vital union. Body and soul are correlative ideas; the one always implies the other. To think of a "soul" is to think of the "body" whose soul it is; and to think of a body is to think of the soul whose body it is: My body is the body of my soul, and my soul is the soul of my body. I am not two beings but one. My life is one, my death is one. The death which is the wages of sin is death for the whole man, body as well as soul. Eternal life, the gift of God in Jesus Christ, is life for the whole man—the body becomes a temple of the Holy Ghost; and the final salvation is the resurrection, the revivifying of the whole man, soul and body unto the fulness of eternal life. And I venture to say that this Biblical doctrine is the only one that

provides a sufficient basis for a completely moral view of human life; and that it is in full agreement with the findings of modern physiology and psychology, revealing as they do how intimately mental and moral life is bound up with the bodily organism, how soul and body act and react upon one another in a hundred marvellous ways. Ruskin goes very far, but he is probably right, when he says that it is impossible to have a perfect soul in an imperfect body or to have a perfect body without a perfect soul.

The teaching of the New Testament on this subject is given in its fullest form by St. Paul in this chapter. Let us consider what that teaching is.

In the first place, however, one is compelled to point out what it is not. The traditional idea, perhaps it may still be called the popular idea, of resurrection is that the body of the future is just the body of the present, the body which is laid in the tomb, raised up and reanimated, composed still of the same material particles. And that, no doubt, was the primitive theory. That theory is taught in some of the Jewish Apocalyptic writings and the Talmud; it was taught by some of the Fathers of the Church and the Schoolmen of the middle ages, and from them it has come down into the traditional beliefs of Christendom. But it is here explicitly set aside and rejected by St. Paul. "Thou Fool," he says, "thou sowest not that body which shall be." It

is physically impossible. As every one knows, the material particles of which a human body is built up sooner or later return to the natural elements, and must in the course of ages enter into the composition of many human bodies. You cannot, indeed, attempt to imagine a resurrection of that sort without plunging into depths of grotesque absurdity. It is so evident, too, that any body like the present material body would be wholly unfitted for the higher forms of life in the Heavenly World. It would be as if the fledged lark whose wings are ready for soaring skyward were doomed still to live within its shell, or the butterfly made for the sunshine and the flowers were still to be confined with the coffin of its grubhood.

But if the body of the future is not materially identical with the body of the present, two questions arise: What is its nature? and how is it related to the present body? As to its physical constitution St. Paul has nothing to say except that it is not of flesh and blood. Yet since it is a body, having form and occupying space, it seems necessary to believe that it has a material subsistence of some kind. Now the composition of matter is the great problem with which science is at present wrestling, and regarding which it sometimes seems to be on the verge of great discoveries. And scientists are agreed that the physical universe is filled throughout with a material substance of a far subtler kind than our senses

have cognizance of, which they call æther. It is by means of æther that light travels. It absolutely permeates all the grosser forms of matter, so that a body composed of this æthereal substance would pass through a stone-wall without resistance, and would glide through space with the swiftness of a sunbeam. I am not saying that the "spiritual" body is composed of æther. I am not even making the suggestion—let no one carry away that idea. I am only offering an illustration of the possibility that there may be a body, and, if we believe St. Paul, of the fact that there is a body which we can never see with these eyes, nor touch with these hands, nor perceive by any of our present senses.

What powers of sensation and action it may have there is nothing to tell us; but we may reasonably believe that they will far exceed those we now possess. We have only our five senses, only these five windows of the soul through which we can know anything of God's universe. Beyond that it is to us a sealed book. We know, however, that the book contains pages we have never read. We know that there are sounds of such a pitch that no human ear can detect them but to which some of the lower animals are sensitive; and that there are rays of light and shades of colour no human eye can see. It is not a pure guess to say that the physical universe has other phenomena as real as light or heat or sound, which are unknown to us simply because we have

not organs of sensation corresponding to them. And it is scarcely a mere guess to say that our house which is from Heaven will have many more windows to it than the earthly house of this tabernacle. What new beauties may not disclose themselves to the poet and the artist, what undreamt of sciences to the thinker, what new powers to the man of action?

But all that is speculation, though it is intelligent speculation. Let us follow St. Paul. All he attempts is to point out certain leading features in which our Resurrection body necessarily differs from the present body, and by which it is fitted to be the organ of a perfected human life.

The one, he says, is "sown in corruption"; the other is "raised in incorruption." Let us dwell for a minute on that word "sown." I suppose that, through the constant reading of this passage as part of the Burial Service, we take this word as referring to the literal burying of the body in the earth. But the Apostle's meaning, I feel sure, is far wider than that. We bury what is dead, but we sow what is living. "That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die." What St. Paul means is that the present life is the *seedtime* for the body no less than for the soul. The "sowing" of the body does not begin at death. It is finished then; but all the time we are here we are sowing the seed of the body which shall be ours forever. And it is sown in *corruption*. One of the first facts about our

present body is that it is corruptible. It is subject continually to waste and decay. We die daily. Every movement of hand and foot, every beat of the heart, means waste, and it is only by a process of constant renewal and repair that the body continues in health and vigour. Hence the necessity of our bodily appetites. And we know how prolific a source of temptation these imperious cravings of the corruptible body are, how they tempt to sins of the flesh, and how all men, rich and poor alike, are apt to be tyrannized by the thought, What shall we eat? What shall we drink and wherewithal shall we be clothed? We know, too, how this tempts continually to distrust of God, and to envy, covetousness and injustice towards our fellowmen. One can scarcely conceive what would be the emancipation of being delivered from all fear of want, sickness or death, all anxiety about a livelihood for ourselves and those dependent upon us, all the cares and temptations arising from the necessities of the corruptible body. But if now we fight the good fight against those temptations, this very thing shall be our reward. We shall be clothed again with a body which is incorruptible, in which therefore there are no clamorous, overbearing physical appetites, nor any of the manifold temptations of flesh and blood. That fight won here will never have to be fought again. Then the apostle says of the present body that it is sown in *dishonour*. It is what he elsewhere describes as

this "body of our humiliation." It is of the earth, earthy; and its frailties, its ailments, and sometimes its defacements and deformities, are the cause of much suffering and humiliation. Many things in this world have suffered because of sin; but except the human soul nothing has suffered so terribly as the human body. We cannot tell what even this corruptible body might be, had we and our forefathers never violated its sanctity and impaired its beauty and weakened its vital powers by sin: But its day of compensation is coming. Its redemption draweth nigh. It will be raised in glory.

Further, the present body is characterized by *weakness*. We cannot do what we would. Labour is toilsome, even the labour we love, and cannot continue long without cessation. Thought wears out our energies; exertion exhausts our vigour; and in the moments when we are most eager to press forward the weak body cries out in protest "Thus far and no farther." It is sown in weakness, but again, if we use its feeble powers to do the will of God, it will be raised in power. "If I could only go as I am now," Darwin said once, "If I could have my head sixty years old and my body twenty-five, I could do something." Earth cannot grant such a boon, but Heaven will. The body will be no longer the weak partner but the soul's perfect instrument; no longer needing to have its inertia whipped and

spurred into action, it will be the soul's untiring helpmeet. It will be raised in power.

But the crowning distinction is that it will be raised a *spiritual body*. That which we now have is a natural or sensuous body. It links us with the lower creation rather than with the higher. Its pleasures and pains are those of sense. Its sphere is that of earthly things. It is true that this natural body is influenced by the spiritual life; but it is so only in a limited degree. Its health or sickness, vigour or debility, pleasure or pain, is determined far more by physical than by spiritual conditions. A violent toothache will hinder a good man in his work or his prayers as much as a criminal in his crimes, and the most black-hearted villain may enjoy more robust health than the most saintly Christian. But the body of the Resurrection will be a spiritual body. Not that it will be bereft of senses, but its formative principle will be the spirit, that element in our nature which is most akin to the Divine. Here the body is healthy or sickly, comely or uncomely, according to the physical vitality that animates it. Here great souls, like St. Paul, may be in bodily presence weak, while small souls may be clothed in superb physique; pure souls may dwell in diseased and corrupted frames, while leprous souls may inhabit spotless flesh and moral deformity be associated with physical charm. But hereafter the outward man will take the mould of the inward; the body will perfectly

represent and embody the character, purity in its lustre, wisdom and faith in their dignity of stature, love in its heavenly glory.

And now I pass to my last point, on which rests the practical bearing of this whole subject. This body of the future, which is so marvellously different from that of the present, is nevertheless vitally related to it. It has what we call an organic connection with it. And this St. Paul illustrates by his famous analogy of the seed sown in the earth and the fruit or flower that springs from it. You plant a bulb and by-and-by you find a lovely and fragrant lily; an acorn, and on the spot there will stand a hundred years hence a stately oak. What can be more unlike than a bulb and a lily, an acorn and an oak, a grub and a butterfly, an egg and a bird? Apart from actual experience, who would deem it possible that the *same life* should assume forms so dissimilar? Yet Nature is one vast magazine of examples of this universal law. So, says the Apostle, is the resurrection from the dead, the transformation of the body that now is into that which is to come. That transformation we have never yet witnessed. Hereafter it may seem as natural as the germination of a seed; but now—can the bird in the egg foresee what it is to have—wings and song? Can the coarse and unsightly bulb imagine the fragrant and ethereal flower? As little can we imagine what it will be for this corruptible to put on incorruption, for this body

of our humiliation to be fashioned into the likeness of Christ's Glorious Body.

We cannot imagine it as a process; but we can see the practical significance of it as a fact. It is this, that whatever a man soweth that shall he also reap, and that this life is seedtime for the body as well as for the soul. As now we are sowing the seeds of the character which in its full development will be ours in eternity, so we are sowing the seeds of that body also which shall be its outward counterpart and yokefellow. Brethren, I believe that we are growing our spiritual body all the time; every act of our present life is inexorably linked with its future. There are, I believe, certain plain facts of experience which are a prophecy, one might even say an earnest and a beginning of the resurrection of the body. We all know, or ought to know, how the state of the mind affects the well-being of the body. We know how the spirit within stamps itself upon the flesh, and especially on the countenance. Have you never caught a glimpse of the spiritual body even here? Have you never seen faces, the face perhaps of a grey-haired, wrinkled old man or woman, or of a pallid invalid, made beautiful by the beautiful life behind it? Have you never seen faces that shine with goodness, faces made pure by purity of heart? Have you never seen the strength and nobility which sit upon the countenance when heroic resolve and high endeavour fill the soul; the dignity and

beauty which patient suffering gives; or how when some strong tide of the spirit is sweeping through a man's being, it alters the fashion of his countenance, and seems to dilate his very form and figure and make the weakest as an angel of God? These are familiar facts, and they are of far-reaching significance. They show the moulding power of spirit over matter. They are a prophecy, and so far as they go, a beginning of the final transfiguration by which the image of the earthly shall be changed into the image of the heavenly. The resurrection of the body begins in us now as truly as the regeneration of the soul. They are parts of the same Divine redemptive process. Life is a unity here and hereafter, and we know not in what mysterious ways we are preparing for ourselves, or rather in ourselves, the body as well as the soul that shall be ours hereafter.

I ask you to think seriously of this:—a spiritual body, a body which completely corresponds to your spirit and character. Think what would be seen in this world, if it were so now. If blindness of soul, if uncleanness of heart, if the fevers of passion, and the swelling tumors of vanity, and the cancers of hate, produced their counterparts in the outward man, how many now seen in health and comeliness would assume forms from which the eye would turn with instinctive loathing. And the splendid transformations we should behold! What dignity of stature, what athletic

vigour and grace, would many a weak and puny form suddenly acquire! How should the lame leap as an hart, and the deaf hear, and the stammering tongue be endowed with moving eloquence! How many wasted with sickness and pain, how many enfeebled and withered with age, would find new life and vigour coursing through their veins, a new lustre glowing in their countenance! It shall be so. The body shall be as the spirit is. And both shall be what our faith in Christ or our no-faith, what our thoughts, words and deeds, whether inspired by the Spirit of Christ or by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life, are now making them. Christ begins with what is inmost. Human reformers begin with the outside of things, the body, the house, the material environment. Christ first carries purity and health to the heart, and works outward to the body and its surroundings. But these will be reached in due time. Is Christ making our hearts like His own? Then He will by-and-by make our bodies like His own. Is He renewing our spirit now? Then soon He will make all things new.

VI: JUDGMENT TO COME

VI

JUDGMENT TO COME

“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”—Hebrews ix:27.

“We must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”—2 Corinthians v:10.

It is appointed unto men once to die. Our term of life is brief; and in a few years we shall be of the innumerable forgotten dead. We form each of us but a drop in the ocean of this world's life. What lasting importance can attach to our conduct, to the use we make of these fleeting years, which are as “the wind that passeth and that cometh not again”? The answer to such questions is, “After death the judgment.” Human life and destiny are not a little thing; their lines are too vast and complex to meet in this world; they converge only to a point beyond it. There, not here, not in the grave but before the judgment-seat of God, the drama of human history is brought to its close.

In the New Testament this is described in the language of apocalyptic symbolism. It is pic-

tured as the Grand Assize. There is the vision of a Great White Throne, before which are gathered all nations, the millions of millions who have lived upon the earth, all standing on a common level before the presence of One who sees through the whole life and character of every individual soul; and we read of books that are opened and of men being judged according to what is recorded therein. All this is plainly a symbolic clothing of spiritual realities with the familiar forms and proceedings of earthly courts of justice. It is a sublime picture which we must endeavour to interpret.

To think of Judgment as only an event of the future, to regard it only as a single crisis, is to take a superficial view. Christ's judgment seat is always set up in this world. If there has ever been in human history a day of judgment, that in which we are now living is such a day. Christ is bringing many hidden realities and unrealities to light. He is judging Christendom, shewing up the paganism that was overlaid with only a thin veneer of Christianity. He is bringing out the latent evil that was in the world, a subterranean fire that has only erupted and broken loose in the war. He is bringing out, too, the good much of which lay dormant, the faith, the loyalty and heroism, the power of self-sacrifice to the uttermost. And He is judging us as a nation, trying us in these anxious days as silver is tried, to prove whether we have the fortitude and courage

which only rise with danger, the resolution which is only hardened by difficulty, the qualities of soul that will fit us to be His chosen weapon against the forces of iniquity. Christ's judgment seat is always here. It is largely true, though by no means wholly true, that the "history of the world is the judgment of the world."

It is true also that the judgment seat is set up in every man's life. Everything we do carries with it its own retribution. Whether it be good or bad, life is its own judgment. It records itself upon itself. The thief, the liar, the sluggard, the hero, the philanthropist, the saint, he who sows to the flesh and he who sows to the spirit, each finds the reward of what he has done in what he *is*. You, young men, have written the first chapter of your lives, and what you now are at the end of that chapter is God's judgment upon it. And you who have written the second or the third chapter—God's verdict upon these is that they have made you what you are. There needs no recording angel; life is its own recorder. There needs no Book of Judgment written in Heaven; you yourself are that book. The characters in which it is written may be illegible, at best they are but faintly legible, to our dull eyes; but could we read them as God reads them we should see that the solemnities of Eternity enfold us as closely now as ever they will do, that life squares accounts with us between the rising and setting sun. And we must be made to see it,

must have our eyes opened to see what we are, and how we have become what we are, and why. We must be made *manifest* before the judgment seat of Christ.

The New Testament represents this as the inevitable sequel of death. And why this must be is evident. At death the first great stage of existence is ended. It cannot then be altered. And if this first stage of existence is to have any moral value, if at any rate it is to have its full moral value, for what comes after, it must be reviewed and seen in the one true light, the light of Christ. On the threshold of that other life all self-ignorance and self-deception must end. We must be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ. There the last mask of pretence will be torn from the face of hypocrisy, and all uprightness will be openly vindicated. Yet it is not with the judgment of others we can be principally concerned hereafter any more than here. In that light which shines from the face of Christ we shall first of all and chiefly be revealed ourselves to ourselves.

St. Paul emphasizes this result, but upon the process by which it is to be brought about he sheds no clear light. It is plain, however, that the judgment of God can become a reality only through self-judgment, that is through memory and conscience, although by what means the action of these faculties will be stimulated we do not know and need not try to conjecture.

There must be the awakening of *Memory*. Memory, we know, is capable of strange awakenings. We seem to forget vastly more than we remember; ninety-nine per cent. of the objects that pass across the field of mental vision vanish into oblivion and seem to leave no trace. Yet we know how the memory of long-forgotten experiences may be suddenly startled into life. We know that in certain states of the mind not only single facts but a whole region of forgotten knowledge may emerge in memory. All that we know of the working of memory points to the conclusion that we forget nothing in the sense of not being able at some time to recall it or have it recalled to us. As the islets that stud the bosom of the ocean are the mountain-peaks of submerged continents, so our conscious recollections are only the outstanding heights of a buried past. There is no word we have spoken, no event we have taken part in, no impression we have ever received, but has left its imprint on the tablets of Memory; and it needs only the proper vivifying touch to make these faded records of the soul glow again into distinctness. And we may well believe that it shall be so hereafter. We speak of a recording angel; but the true recording angel is Memory. The finger of God will touch these indestructible records of the soul and they will live again. The things we have done in the body will come back to us, the good thought and the evil thought, the secret prayer,

the secret curse, the hidden deed of love or selfishness, the temptation bravely withstood or weakly yielded to, the kind word, the cruel word, the opportunity seized, and the opportunity lost. Let us not suppose that we have seen the last of anything; let us not live on that supposition. So far as is necessary to God's ends we shall see it all again.

And we shall see so much in a new light. Judgment implies not only a great awakening of Memory but a great enlightening and quickening of Conscience. "We must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ." What does that mean? What is it to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, not figuratively but really and spiritually? It means this at any rate, that Christ will be the sole standard for our judgment of ourselves and our actions, our standard of judgment for all things. We shall judge ourselves and everything else by the test of likeness or unlikeness to Christ. That is the one real test, you know; and to that all things must in the end come. Before Christ—that is the one place where all can meet on common ground. The scholar and the ploughboy, the philosopher and the child, the prince and the pauper, all can meet spiritually before the cross of Christ here and must meet before the judgment seat of Christ hereafter. This, surely, is the essence of judgment to come—all persons and all things seen, measured and appraised according to their rela-

tion to Christ, seen in the light of eternal truth, seen as Christ sees them. Judgment is the mind of Christ manifested to us and in us. Here we live where a hundred cross lights play upon us, in the world with its worldly maxims and standards, its little tribunals of fashion and convention and opinion; but there we are carried up into the one true Light and are made manifest in it. Think of it! Here is a man whose only enquiry about any action or any plan of his has been, "will it be profitable?" or "will it be popular?" or "will it be agreeable and comfortable?" who has never once all his long life asked himself, "will it be right?" And there he finds himself where that is the only question about everything; and in that light he sees himself as he is. I do not think that anything else will be needed, that any dramatic act of judgment will be necessary. The soul will see itself and judge itself.

And here is another man who, while he is in the world, is earnestly striving to live by a higher law, who does not determine his course by asking whether this or that will be profitable or popular or pleasant, but with all his stumblings and failings still lives by faith in Christ, still tries to measure things by the standard of Christ and to walk by His light—think what it will be for that man when death sweeps all other presences away and sets him with his character and his past life in the presence of Him he has loved and tried to follow! Will that be terrible? Perhaps it would

if Christ allowed it to be, if He made the light to shine only or chiefly on our imperfections and inconsistencies. But He will not. Conscience will doubtless be quickened in regard to all that needs to be rebuked and purged away; but these are not the main things in the soul that has set its trust on Christ and made Him its ideal. That soul, too, will be made *manifest* before the judgment seat of Christ; manifested in the glory and strength of what it has really lived by and lived for. You do not know, Christian, how glorious your faith, the weakness of which you often lament, will appear in that light. You cannot imagine the recognition your lowly, imperfect service will receive. One of the marvels of judgment which Christ always emphasized is the manifestation of the great principle in the commonplace act. Interpreted by Him the "cup of cold water" becomes a royal gift; what you do to "one of the least of these" a rich offering unto God. Go on then, not letting your right hand know what your left hand doeth. Never be cheerless; never grow weary in well-doing. It will all bear fruit and its fruit will be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, never fully manifested until then.

We bear the burden and the heat
Of the long day, and wish 'twere done;
Not till the hours of light return
All we have built do we discern.

Manifestation, then, is the first element in judgment. We must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ. Let us look next at the second element, Award: "That every one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad." "*The things done.*" Mark the emphasis on this. The pith and marrow of the Christian religion is that we are not saved by "things done." We are saved by Christ. Christ is the centre of the Spiritual Universe and our position there is determined by our relation to Him. But side by side with this truth the New Testament, and every writer in the New Testament, declares and reiterates this other truth, so that we may never forget it, that though we are not saved, we are judged by the "things done." There will be no rehearsing of creeds, no investigations of our orthodoxy, at the judgment seat of Christ. The things done will be the only query and the only test. The principles in the deep chambers of the heart by which men have chosen their path, their faith and hope and aspirations, the inner spirit of their lives, will have their evidence in the actual moral product. The tree is known by its fruits; the appeal is to conduct.

Yet it is never said that God will judge our works, but always that He will judge men according to their works. And it is one thing to pronounce judgment upon a man's works, and

quite another to judge the man according to his works. Even we can do the one; the other we dare not. To judge an action is usually a simple matter. Without any hesitation we approve the conduct of the Good Samaritan and condemn that of the Priest and the Levite. Empanel any jury you please and you will get a unanimous verdict. The one action is good, the other bad. But to judge men, to measure responsibility and desert and nicely apportion praise or blame, is beyond us. For this we should need the power to view another's conduct not from without but from within; to put ourselves not only in his circumstances but, so to say, inside his skin, to think his thoughts, and feel the pressure of his temptations as he feels them.

Then at the balance let's be mute,
We never can adjust it.
What's done we partly may compute,
But never what's resisted.

Human judgment at its best is a rough and tentative aiming at justice. The judge on the bench who sentences the felon in the dock knows that if all men had their absolute deserts, there are a multitude of persons who would exchange places with the condemned criminal. The judgment of Him in whom we live and move and have our being will modify or reverse many a human judgment.

There the tears of earth are dried;
There the hidden things are clear,
There the work of life is tried
By a juster judge than here.

The surprise of the final verdict is one of the thoughts on which the teaching of Jesus often dwells. "Many that are last shall be first, and the first last."

It is appointed unto all men once to die, but after this the judgment. It must be so. When we have completed this first probationary stage of existence, it must be seen what place we are fitted for in the next. Yes, that, I feel convinced, is the right way to think of Divine judgment. It is not so much giving us what we deserve, as it is giving us what we are fit for, what we have fitted ourselves to be and to do. The servant who has doubled his talents is promoted to be lord over many things, because in the smaller sphere he has fitted himself for the larger. We have our place and our career of opportunity in this world, and as we occupy these we are fitting ourselves for a place and a career in the eternal world. If you ask what then Christ does for us, I reply that He does everything. He does not abrogate or alter the law that as a man soweth so shall he reap; but He makes it a law unto salvation. He gives you the right seed to sow, and the right soil to sow it in, and the possibility of sowing it unto life eternal. Sow the seed Christ gives you, sow unto the spirit not to the flesh;

take Christ into your hearts by faith and love and sow Christ in your lives by the work of faith and the labour of love, then at that day He will give you the harvest of all your sowing, multiplied with a Divine increase.

After death the judgment. It must be so. Shall I startle you if I say that it must be so for our very salvation? How should we be fitted to enter into the perfect life of the purified until we have been searched and tried and made manifest in the full light of Christ? It is sometimes believed and taught that Christians will be exempt from judgment; but such a doctrine is not to be found within the boards of the New Testament. The truth is we could not afford to be exempt; nor sincerely loving and seeking the best could we desire to be exempt. Were we to begin the life to come without this we should necessarily carry over into that life the self-ignorance, the errors, prejudices and inconsistencies that cling to us until the day of our death. Though we have built upon the One Foundation, we have built upon it not only gold, silver and costly stones, but too much else of baser material. And we cannot carry our wood, hay and stubble into that other life. Thank God for that! We cannot desire to carry on that kind of building there. It is a welcome thought that all spurious and inferior elements will be, as it were, burned out of our character by the judgment of Christ. It may be an experience not

without pain; but is not this our prayer and our heart's desire?—"whether by water or by fire, oh make me clean." Dear brethren, if that is our desire, the judgment of Christ will be only the crowning mercy, the finishing stroke of our redemption, the last cleansing, fitting us for the fellowship of the pure in heart and opening the gates of heavenly life.

To sum up, judgment to come means the verdict of Christ upon every man and upon every man's character and life; it means that verdict brought home to every man, and taking effect in the assigning to every man of his own place in the eternal world. To those who have listened to Christ's voice here, who have committed themselves to Him and His service, and have made it their ambition to be well pleasing unto Him, that verdict will be one of loving acquittal, nay, of joyous welcome, and in so far as it is one of censure it will bring with it the last word of pardon they can ever need. There are those for whom, doubtless, its efficacy will have to be realized through some severer process. And if there are those who have so sinned against the light that they have killed conscience and put out the eyes of the soul, so lost that they are incapable of knowing and obeying the truth—if there are such, I confess that I do not see how the Divine verdict is ever to be brought home to them, and I do not know what God will make of

them. It would seem that even Hell could not do them any good.

The only resource, the paramount duty, is to anticipate that day, to put ourselves before the judgment seat of Christ now while from His judgment seat we can always turn again to His cross, to come with an honest and good heart into the light of Christ now, confessing our sins and walking in the light even as He is in the light. That is the only refuge. I came upon a golden sentence in Plato last week, one worthy of the Bible itself: "There is no way of escape for an evil man except to become good." How deep, how true that is! O evil man, there is no refuge, no escape for you, but to become good. No other. You may search the world and heaven and hell, but there is no outlet for you save that. The hounds of God will pursue you remorselessly until you take that way. You must surrender to that necessity. You must consent to become good, a new creature; and you were best to do it now. But Plato could not tell the evil man how to become good, to obtain deliverance from his evil past and his evil self. Christ not only tells you this, He gives the deliverance. His pierced Hand holds out your pardon; take it. The light of His Face will shew you the way of life; walk in it. The power of His Spirit will strengthen you to win the victory; trust in it, put it to the proof. To all this is my message—Let us come in deep sincerity to

Him who is both Saviour and Judge, confessing the sins we know, asking Him to search us and see if there be any wicked way in us, casting on Him the full burden of our soul's needs; and so begin and continue the life which we know is eternal life, the life in which Christ will recognize the fruit of His own. Then, though sun and moon go out in darkness, His Face will be our Everlasting Light.

VII: THE HEAVENLY WORLD

VII

THE HEAVENLY WORLD

“A better country, that is an heavenly.”—Hebrews xi:16.

THE story is told that when Henry the Fourth of France once asked the Duke of Alva his opinion about some of the astronomical mysteries of the heavens, the Duke replied, “Sire, I am too much occupied on earth to have leisure to think of heaven.” And, as applied not to the visible but to the invisible heavens, the words exactly express the opinion and practice of many. We preach much less, and think much less, about Heaven than our fathers did, or than the Christians of New Testament times did: but I do not know that we are entitled to claim superiority on that account. It is true that a great deal of talk about Heaven may be merely sentimental indulgence, an anodyne to induce lethargic content with a present whose evils cry aloud to be grappled with and overcome; but as a source of spiritual energy, as a motive to courageous action and patient endurance, I do not believe that we can afford to neglect the hope set before us, any more than could the saints of earlier times. If we believe

in that life beyond the veil and look forward to it as the state to which we are going, we ought to think about it, and indeed we must think about it. And it is not only the prospect for ourselves that bids us think of it. If that state is meanwhile future to us, it is not future but present to the vast multitude of human beings who have lived on earth. There is scarcely one of us, except the very young, who have not much of their heart's best treasure laid up there. Parents, brothers, sisters or children, friends and companions of our journey, are there. We went with them to the furthest verge of life; but they have passed from our sight and from our call. They are not here, they are there; and how can we but think sometimes of how it is with them there, how they are spending the long moments of Eternity?

“He that hath found some fledged birds’ nest may know,
At first sight, if the bird be flown;
But what fair well or grove he sings in now,
That is to him unknown.

And yet as Angels in some brighter dreams
Call to the soul, when man doth sleep,
So some strange thoughts transcend our wonted themes,
And into glory peep.”

My subject this evening is the Heavenly World. Do not expect, however, that I am going to attempt a picture or description of that world. The more detailed and concrete such descriptions are the more certain are they to be merely and

crudely fanciful. Eye hath not seen; ear hath not heard. The speech even of the New Testament on such a subject is necessarily that of symbolic imagery. We can have no safe guide to our thoughts except the great certitudes of Christian faith and such inferences as Christian experience may enable us to draw from them.

In an earlier sermon of this series I dwelt upon the fact that the life of immortality is life in a bodily form: and from this it follows that Heaven is a place. However true it is that Heaven in its essence is a spiritual state and that "'tis Heaven must come, not we must go," still as the perfect life has its perfect organism in the Spiritual Body, it must also have its perfect environment in an external sphere of being which, like that body, corresponds to the inward character. And this is the uniform presupposition in the New Testament. With that certainty, however, our knowledge ends. When we say that Heaven is a place, we must remember that the word "place" may denote something of which our experience does not enable us to form any conception. We know space only of the three dimensions, length, breadth and height, and we can conceive no other. But it does not follow that there are no others. If we lived in a universe where lines were the only magnitudes, we should be unable to conceive of breadth: in a universe of surfaces only we should be unable to conceive of depth. So it is perfectly possible that space may

have other dimensions than the three that are known to us, and that such questions about heaven as whether it is up or down, near or far, are really meaningless. The most reasonable supposition is that the Heavenly World is separated and hidden from us only by some property of space of which we are ignorant.

Heaven is somewhere and the somewhere may be here as much as it is anywhere. The New Testament speaks of it as "that within the veil"; and the phrase, though it is used in a different line of thought, is a suggestive one. It was only a veil which in the Jewish Temple separated the Holy of Holies from the outer courts. So may it be in the great Temple of the universe. It is not vast distance but only a veil, the thinnest of partitions, that separates us from the Heavenly World. If I have any belief on the subject it is that that world is here though unseen, sundered from us only by the limitations of our own nature, the veil of flesh and blood, by which we are as effectually debarred from all sense-contact with it as by immeasurable space.

And since we are totally unable to perceive this world behind the veil with any senses we possess, it follows that we are equally unable to imagine it in any kind of physical concreteness. We can think of it only in a general way as the perfect environment for the perfect life: and this even the New Testament can help us to do only by means of negatives. What in effect it bids us to do is

to think of everything in this present world that imposes imperfection and limitation upon the life of man, and then be assured that in the Heavenly World no such thing is to be found.

In one great comprehensive negation which includes all others, it is said that there shall be "*no curse any more*" (Rev. xxii:3). But is there anything in this present world, you may say, which, except sin and apart from sin, can be called a curse? Do not all things work together for good to them that love God? Yes, but to say that they work for good is not to say that they are in themselves good. Take pain for an instance. Pain may be a discipline of highest value. We know indeed that a life without suffering would not be good for any human being. We need our cross. But pain simply as pain, suffering as such, is undeniably a curse. In the Heavenly World there shall be no more pain. Take War: how much poorer the history of man would be without the heroisms and magnanimities, the acts of splendid self-devotion called forth in war. Yet war in itself is a curse, and the clear Christian duty is to work for its restriction and its ultimate abolition. Heaven is a world of peace. Take labour: we know that the perpetual conflict with nature to which man is committed, the necessity of winning her gifts by incessant toil, vigilance and ingenuity, has been the making of him; but that is not to say that stern exhausting toil is not in itself a curse. Who could look for-

ward to an eternity of it without dismay? The Heavenly World exacts no such tribute. There they rest from their labours. We can see that God has placed us here in a world and under conditions which are adapted to our imperfect moral development. A world without pain, conflict, toil, sorrow, death, would be for us the worst of worlds; it would stupefy, brutalize and destroy us forever. But though the imperfect life needs such an environment, this is not God's final programme for humanity. As human character improves and becomes more Christlike, the outward conditions of life even in this world will doubtless be vastly changed for the better. Disease and pain will be in a large measure prevented or mitigated. The story of our race will no longer be written in war and blood. Human toil will be abated of its severity, and poverty of its wretchedness. Humanity is groping its way to some more equitable and gracious social system than that which is based on a naked antagonism of interests, with all its wasteful struggle. A better time will come even here. One cannot tell how like the Kingdom of Heaven this world may become. Yet earth never can be Heaven. That is certain. Never can we hope that humanity will here be delivered from temptation, weariness, sorrow and pain, from all the limitations and imperfections which are inherent in the present constitution of things. For this, the Bible tells us, a new heaven and a new earth are needed,

a new order of nature. And it tells us, too, that such a world does exist, where, the discipline of earth having done its work, it remains only to bring forth its fruit unto everlasting perfection. That Heavenly World, God's ideal order of nature, already exists (though not in its final completeness); and into that world, as everything in the New Testament teaches us to believe, the redeemed, purified and perfected by the vision and judgment of Christ, enter when they pass within the veil.

In the same book of Revelation, two striking and comprehensive symbols are used in the same negative fashion to describe the physical perfections of the inheritance of the saints. The first is that in the apocalypticist's vision of it "*there was no more sea.*" That does not appeal to us who go down to the sea in ships and do business in great waters. The sea forms the roads and bridges of our island Empire. Our poets and artists find never-ending charm in its changing moods and haunting mysteries. But the Jew was not a sailor. All through the Bible you will find that the sea is a symbol of evil significance, a symbol of perpetual unrest and unfruitful strife—"The wicked is like the troubled sea which cannot rest"; a symbol of swelling pride and menacing rage and high sounding fury—"The floods, O Lord, have lifted up, the floods have lifted up their voice. The Lord on high is mightier than the voice of many waters, yea, than the mighty

waves of the sea." So must we understand the saying, "there was no more sea." The Heavenly World is one of perfect harmony. Nature has ceased in any of its operations to be antagonistic to man. Here life is a voyage over a turbulent sea. Changing, often adverse, circumstances come rolling after each other like the unnumbered billows. We surmount one only to find another following in its wake. We have our calms, too, but infrequent and of short duration. In the throng of our cares and the bustle of our lives we look forward to a time when we shall have overtaken the demands upon us and be, for a little while at least, free from pressure; but the hope oftenest proves illusory. There is for the most part the incessant call to keep the ship's head against the sea, "ever climbing up the climbing wave." Such is our life here. But there the toil-worn voyager shall be done with "the weary oar, the weary wandering fields of barren foam." He shall drop anchor in his desired haven and go up into the City which hath foundations. "And there was no more sea." No more conflict with adverse circumstance, with the severities of nature. The drought that scorches, the flood and the hurricane that devastate, the pestilence that walks in darkness, the catastrophe in commerce or the dire bereavement in the home that in an hour engulfs the gains of arduous years or the joy of a life, as a richly laden vessel founders in the deep—these have no counterpart yonder.

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither doth the sun light on them nor any heat.” There the peace of God that rules the heart rules the elements also; and nature reflects in unsullied brightness the love and wisdom of the Father of Lights. No more strife with nature, and no more strife with evil. Here mighty waves of opposition lift themselves up against God’s will and purpose. Always we seem to face the onrush of some deluge—in one age of boastful, loud-voiced unbelief, in another of luxury, self-indulgence and sensuality, in another of sheer irreligion and spiritual deadness. Always there is that sea of evil, restless, heaving, threatening, striving to break in and undermine and overwhelm. And God permits this; for it is our very life to strive against odds, to fight the good fight of faith. But in that better world there is no more this surrounding sea of evil, no jarring will, no discordant note. We pray that God’s will may be done on earth as it is done in Heaven. There is one will in Heaven. The noisy waves of strife have died forever away. The Heavenly World is the world of Divine peace. Nature and spirit are at one. “There shall be no more sea.”

The Heavenly World is also a world of light. “There shall be no night there.” “The City had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” Is this language to be taken in any literal sense or is it purely figura-

tive? Is this celestial light to be conceived as spiritual or as physical? As both, I think. Just as in the Spiritual Body, so in the whole constitution of the Heavenly Universe, the natural and spiritual are interfused in a way which, of course, we are unable to comprehend. In the New Testament Heaven is always thought of as a world of transcendent light and glory. And it is so we must think of it, if we are to think of it at all. Light, benign and unfading, is at least the symbol of the atmosphere in which its life continually moves.

“There shall be no night there.” Think of some of the implications of that fact. Here we must *work* while it is day, because the night cometh when no man can work. For we need the pressure and the call of opportunity, fleeting and irredeemable, the ever present sense that the night cometh, to make us work while it is day. A temporal state, in which the present is every moment becoming the past, and what is left undone becomes for ever impossible, is alone suited to our imperfect character. But there is no night, no time-limit, in God’s perfect world. It is to me one of its most unimaginable features, that it is timeless. In the perfected life we shall have such eagerness of delight in the service appointed us that we shall no more need the reminder of the westering sun or the passing hour to hasten our steps. Life shall be without haste arising from any external compulsions. It seems to me

almost the last and highest mark of our future perfection that we shall be fit to be set free from this last of our taskmasters, opportunity.

Here, again, if we have diligently laboured through the hours of light, the day is often long enough, and night comes none too soon. Blessed night that follows the day of toil! shadow of God's merciful hand, hushing His wearied children to sleep. It brings release from the yoke to man and beast. It sets the servant free from his master. It brings oblivion of care and sorrow and stills for a little every throbbing heart. But there shall be no need of night there. Try to think what that implies; to have always the freshness of the morning, never to grow weary in any occupation, to have the interest in it always unflagging, and the strength for it, and the enjoyment of it, the pulse of life always strong and bounding. Such is the prize set before us, if we work the works of God according to our day and the strength appointed for the day.

No night of *sorrow and weeping* shall be there, no night of *death*. Night is a pall which covers from view much of the tragedy of life. It grants the boon of privacy to grief. The solitude of the midnight hour claims the tribute of tears from many who, with aching hearts, bravely face the world. If the story of one night's dying and one night's sorrowing could be placed on canvas, it would be a picture man could not endure to look upon. But though weeping endure for a night,

joy cometh in the morning. In the Heavenly World there shall be no night; for "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Such in faint and misty outline is the world behind the veil, the world into which as the Fore-runner Christ has gone, and into which have followed Him generation after generation of those who have walked by faith, into which, as the years pass, many dear ones whom we have loved and love still have found an entrance. Do we believe in it? Do we really believe? Surely if any man firmly believed that he had a chance, even a bare chance, of winning an inheritance so entirely incalculable, what would he not be ready to do or suffer, what effort would he not sustain, what sacrifice would he not willingly make in order to give himself the full benefit of that chance? There are four classes into which men divide themselves by their attitude towards the hope of Heaven. There are those to whom it makes no appeal, who are so lapped about with this world's good things that they do not desire or care to think of another. For such an one, "tame in earth's paddock for its prize," we must wish that, if nothing else will serve, God will send some thunderbolt to cleave his earthly paradise in twain and deliver his soul alive from its suffocating enclosure. And there are those in whom it does not kindle any ray of belief, who are not very

happy or contented in this world, but hope for nothing beyond it, who just set their teeth to plod along and grind through, knowing that the weariest river reaches at length the sea. If any of you belong to that class, all that I have said has seemed but an idle tale, and you question if I myself believe it. Well, I do believe it, because I believe in God and Christ; and I could not believe in the God revealed by Jesus Christ, if I believed that this world and this life represent completely and finally our relation to the Power, whatever it be, to which we owe our existence. May God send the light of His love into your soul that you may see also the glory of the great hope! And there are those in whom the thought of the Heavenly World awakens no disbelief but scarcely as yet any desire or hope. It is thus with many who truly love Christ, with, I suppose, most young Christians. It is true that the very young, if we may judge by their favourite hymns, think much about Heaven; it makes a vivid appeal to the imagination of the child. But that is usually a passing phase; and in the experience of young Christians the hope of the heavenly inheritance is not as a rule strongly influential. But it will become so. More and more their looking unto Jesus, as they run the race set before them, will lead their eyes to rest in hope upon the Land that is beyond the flood of time. Of such is the fourth class; those in whom, amid the conflict and the labour and the losses of the world,

Christ lives not only as the Master of the life that now is but more and more as the Hope also of the better life to come. Happiest of all are you to whom such words apply. For that is a hope that maketh not ashamed, an anchor to the soul both sure and steadfast, a hope that grows the stronger as others weaken and decay, the hope whose progress is "Jesus in Heaven, Jesus in the heart, Heaven in the heart, the heart in Heaven." Perhaps nothing in ordinary human experience does so much towards this as the experience of bereavement. As faith and love, memory and hope, follow loved ones within the veil, they give a new reality to the unseen world. While they were with us their presence ministered to an earthly love; now they beckon us onward to a better country, that is, an heavenly; they invite us to set Christ and His Heaven before us as our aim, until for us, too, the day come, as come it will, when our warfare shall be accomplished.

Jesus in mercy bring us
To that dear land of rest,
Who art with God the Father
And Spirit ever blest.

VIII: THE HEAVENLY LIFE

VIII

THE HEAVENLY LIFE

“And his servants shall serve him. And they shall see his face and his name shall be on their foreheads.”—Revelation xxii:3, 4.

IN the last sermon of this series I endeavoured to bring into view the glimpses which the New Testament offers us of the Heavenly World. A still higher theme now claims our thought—the Heavenly Life. There must be conditions of that life by which it stands in complete contrast to life as we know it and which in our present state we cannot hope to comprehend. For example, its everlastingness. When we try to contemplate eternity we can think of it only from our experience of time, yet we know that from the conception of time we can never reach the conception of eternity. To comprehend a life which is not transient yet is not stationary, in which there is movement and fulness of activity, is not possible under our present limitations. But no such metaphysical problems are raised by the ideas of the Heavenly Life which are prominent in the New Testament. These are all derived from Christian experience, both by similarity and by

contrast. They point forward to a life which is the same and yet not the same as life is now, in which there is nothing essentially new, but in which every element of experience is heightened and perfected, filled unto all the fulness of God. And that Divine fulness will be as little subject to any law of uniformity there as here. There may be wide diversity in the conceptions we form of the perfect life and none the less truth may be in them all. To the imagination of childhood it may be simply the "happy land, far, far away"; to the aspirations of youth the ideal of all truth, beauty and goodness; to the activities of manhood the higher and wider area for the exercise of the powers that have been trained and proved in the narrower sphere of earthly service; to the toil-worn workman, to many a weary soul, Heaven is first of all rest, the rest that remaineth. And the Heavenly Life will be all these, and all that every sanctified nature can crave for its fullest satisfaction. There are many abiding-places in the Father's house. We are made to glorify God and to enjoy Him in many ways.

But there are certain central and essential features of that life as it is revealed to us. Let us think about these. And first there are the correlative ideas of Service and Rest. Heaven is rest. And what is sweeter than rest? When the task to which one has braced his energies is finished and wearied frame and strained nerve are bathed in repose, there is no sensation of

more unalloyed satisfaction nature can furnish. And it is a touching confession of what life is, of the weight of the burden and the severity of the struggle, that the dream of the future which has the deepest fascination for a multitude of minds is that which represents it as repose, rest from all the toil and moil, the tangle and the trouble. How many tired people there are in this world, dragging themselves through the day's work, glad, glad when it is finished, glad too to think sometimes that soon, not too soon for their wishes, the long fatiguing day will be past and the long rest begin. So single and absorbing does this craving sometimes become that it kills out all desire for life hereafter. On Huxley's tomb are engraved the words: "God giveth his beloved sleep; and if an endless sleep he wills 'tis best." And James Thomson, the poet of pessimism, celebrates "the restful rapture of the inviolate grave." These are transparently false thoughts. They are self-contradictory. Extinction is not rapture. It is no more rest than it is activity. Nothing is not something. Still I suppose that some of us can understand the feeling of that very tired woman who said that she would not wish to go to Heaven at once, but would like just to be laid up in lavender for a thousand years beforehand. And it may be that the many mansions will contain such resting-places for weary souls. But ought we not rather to believe that all the rest of that temporary kind we need

may come to us as we die into that other life? We take our nightly sleep and rise, as we say, rested; the exhausted lamp of life has been replenished. And when God gives His beloved sleep we may be sure that they awake rested, recreated for a fuller life on a brighter, happier morrow. But this kind of rest is not the rest of the Heavenly Life. That is *Eternal* rest, an essential and constant element in the life of perfect service. The highest idea of rest is not sleep, idleness or inactivity of any sort; it is fulness of power in happy exercise, life abundant, in-flowing and outflowing. The spiritual nature cannot be refreshed in any other way. Were one to cease to think the intellect instead of becoming brighter would rust; and unexercised affections instead of receiving fresh elasticity would stiffen into apathy. There is rest in health, in the flow of joyful strength; there is rest to the desiring faculties in finding the thing desired; there is rest in the delight of congenial employment. So it is said of the Blessed that they "rest from their labours," and that they "rest not day nor night." A great deal of cheap ridicule has been cast upon the Christian conception of Heaven, as if it meant lifelong, eternal holiday. No, there is no sluggard's paradise there; there are no sluggards there. There His servants shall serve Him; serve Him as they have done here, and also as they have never done here. Here their service is often in itself trivial, irksome, monotonous

drudgery. In what higher, more congenial tasks they serve there, when the rough apprentice-work of earth is done, in what various employments the faculties that have been polished and brought to a keen edge here shall there be used, we know not. But we know that

What here is faithfully begun
Shall be completed, not undone.

To suppose that the service of the Heavenly life is confined to the range of what we technically call "religious" is to take a quite unwarrantable view. There will be places, pursuits, occupations and enjoyments and interests far more diversified, powers and possibilities and scenes of life far more various than here. What new extensions of knowledge and action may enrich that greater life! What new beauties may disclose themselves to the eye of the artist, to the ear of the musician, the imagination of the poet! What new powers to the man of action! One of our Scottish writers tells of a student who, dying of consumption, kept working at his Greek and Hebrew, sure, as he said, that he would be the better fitted for the service of Heaven. It is a thought full of comfort regarding those who are, as it seems, prematurely snatched away from the service of earth. That service does not end; it goes on; it will find in that greater world its fitting sphere; it will bring forth its ripest fruits under that brighter sun. There His servants

serve Him, each in his own fashion; and whatever the service, in it they find eternal rest. All is as natural and necessary as it is for the sun to shine, or for the flowers of spring to give forth their fragrance. It would be labour and imprisonment for them not to serve. We can form no truer conception of the "Saints' Rest" than this, that His servants serve Him, because their choice has become their ever-blessed necessity.

But our text brings us next to the very centre of the Heavenly Life, its vision: "His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His Face." So it is written elsewhere, "We shall see Him as He is"; and it is our Lord's own prayer; "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." These words are a great deep, into which we can but reverently gaze, which we cannot fathom. What is this vision of Christ? Of necessity it is first of all and essentially spiritual. The glory of Christ is a glory of spirit, and must be spiritually discerned. It is not a glory of robe or crown or throne, but the glory of infinite goodness, of love beyond measure, purity and truth without stain. And we behold in Him that glory now. Yet how imperfectly! How much more of the splendour of goodness there must be in Christ than our clearest insight is able to take in. Think how it was when He walked this earth. Some passed Him by; never looked at Him; saw nothing in Him

to look at. Some just looked at Him, and sneered, and went their way. Some looked and hated. And some there were who, though their vision was dull and feeble, did see in Him a glory which drew them to Him, and received some print of His soul upon their own. And when, as was expedient, He was taken away from them as a bodily presence and came to them again in spiritual presence, their eyes were further opened and His glory dawned on their souls with new radiance and power. They saw that the light of His Face was the glory of God. And we, too, if our eyes have been enlightened, behold in Him that Glory. We not only see in Him what excels all the glories of the world, we see that the love which is in Christ is the most glorious thing in God, the Divinest in the Divine. And if we are living in the light of it, we behold this more and more. The nearer we approach to Christ in character the more glorious do we see Him to be. And yet, I say, how imperfect and intermittent is our vision of Him. Christ is rather our star than our sun; the polestar to which we look from time to time in order to take our bearings rather than the sun that floods all our earth and sky with its beams. But in the Heavenly life Christ is the sun, not the star. "The Lamb is the light thereof." Think what that means. Everything is seen in its relation to Christ, in the light of His mind and will, and in that light alone. Here also we see in the light of Christ; in some degree we

see ourselves and our deeds and character, and other men with their deeds and character, in the light of Christ. But here a hundred competing lights play upon us to dazzle and confuse. We are tempted to measure persons and their achievements and qualities by the false and defective standards of the world, are tempted to pay homage to wealth, cleverness, power, success. But there the light of Christ, like the sun when it rises, extinguishes every false or artificial glare, shines upon every path, penetrates character to its most secret depths, reveals every object as it truly is.

Here we walk by faith only, not seeing our goal, not seeing our Guide, taking all on trust. We can but believe the truth, grasping it with the conviction of our souls and clinging to it despite all specious lies. But there faith will be justified by sight. Here we take the path of duty, even when it is stern and forbidding, simply trusting for the Master's approval. There we shall see the smile on His face. Here we firmly believe that the humblest person who faithfully fights the good fight and uses his small talent in a narrow sphere lives a far greater life than the man whose gifts fill the largest space in the world's eye but whose end and aim are self. We hold it true; but we hold it true against appearances. There there will be no conflict between appearance and reality. All false seemings will vanish in that life which moves and has its being

in eternal light. Here we are like the blind man of Bethsaida who, when Christ touched his eyes, saw "men as trees walking." But He will lay His hands upon us a second time, and the cure will be complete; we shall see "all things clearly."

For in the Heavenly Life the vision of Christ is not spiritual only. In some celestial fashion it is corporeal also. There faith and sense are at one; for inward and outward are at one. Body is the perfect counterpart of spirit. Life has attained its consummate unity. In the glorified body, the perfect organ of the soul, we shall see His Face. The true shall behold Him who is the Truth. We cannot comprehend how this shall be. Heaven would not be heaven, if we could now comprehend it. Here we can see the impress of God's hand upon His works; we can partly see His footprints in the track of His Providence; best of all, we can read His heart in the life and death of Jesus Christ. But we cannot see His Face. That is reserved for the luminous side of death. As Plato saw, wonderfully anticipating St. Paul, we are now like men standing in the mouth of a wide cavern with their backs towards the light, seeing only the shadows and reflections cast by the objects that move to and fro in the sunshine behind them. But there we shall be turned from the shadows and reflections to the light itself, and shall see face to face.

Then follows the last, grandest feature of the

Heavenly Life: perfected vision results in perfect likeness. "His name shall be on their foreheads." "We shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is." Again this assimilation to Christ is, of course, essentially spiritual; but not spiritual only. The body, too, shall be fashioned into the likeness of His glorious body. We have seen that even here the soul is to some extent the fashioner of the body; and that the very idea of the spiritual body is its perfect correspondence to the inward life. Here beauty is, as we say, skin-deep; there it is soul-deep. The soul made beautiful by beholding Christ makes the body beautiful as itself. For

"Every spirit as it is more pure
And hath in it the more of heavenly light,
So it a fairer body doth procure
To habit in.
For of the soul the body form doth take,
For soul is form and doth the body make."

It is of the character, therefore, we must primarily think when it is said that "we shall be like Him." "The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness"—so says our Catechism. It is an astounding thought—that we should be made perfect in holiness, filled in every capacity of our being with the Spirit of Christ, absolute goodness, perfect love. "The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness." Why? Because the process is already begun in them here; because the image of God's Son is already present

in every soul that trusts and loves Jesus Christ—there in embryo, so to say, but there in reality, in organic completeness. “The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness.” How? Because their bodies have died? No, because they see Christ. Look at a rosebud. Hidden away in its hard, green casket there are brilliant hues and sweetest fragrance. Though no one could imagine so by looking at it, all is already there that ever will be there; and what is needed to make the bud the paragon of loveliness it is destined to become is that it should see the sun. And that is all the children of God need—to see the Sun of Righteousness. All that is within them will answer to His call. Every half-developed lineament of holy character will gleam forth in the light of His countenance; the whole Christ-image in them come forth vivid and glorious in every feature. It will be a wonder to ourselves. Christian, you do not know how glorious your faith will appear in the sunshine of Heaven. The cross uncomplainingly borne, the work patiently carried on for weary years without a cheer from the world, the temptation trampled underfoot—these look small things; but in the day of manifestation—a multitude of lowly souls will learn with wonder of the greatness and the heroism in things that once looked so commonplace. “His name shall be on their foreheads.”

My brethren, that Heavenly World and that Heavenly Life are realities. They exist; and how

great an influence the thought of them ought to be! How it ought to take the sting out of death, and what strength it ought to put into life! What thanksgiving and solemn joy it ought to inspire for those who have already attained that immortality! There is a beautiful legend which tells that on the night the angels came to Bethlehem one shepherd was detained at home tending a sick guest. The other shepherds saw the heavenly host, heard their song, and beheld their glory, while all the night Shemuel sat alone by the restless sufferer. His fellow-shepherds pitied him because he had missed what they had seen and heard; but in his patient service he had found blessing and reward of his own. He had missed the splendour of the angels, and in serving he gave up his life; for the fever-poison touched him and he died. But he had tasted the joy of sacrifice, and his eyes saw a greater glory than that of angels.

“He died and saw the Uncreated,
All his fellows lived and waited.”

Thanks be to God for all who have tasted that joy of sacrifice and attained to that vision. We live and wait. They see the Uncreated. Theirs is the better lot, yet what heart and hope ought to be ours, whose warfare is not yet accomplished, who have to fight on. The things that are seen are temporal. I thank God for that. Often in these tragic days, I thank God because the things that are seen are temporal. But the things that

are not seen are eternal. Thank God for that, too! And our present light affliction worketh out for us a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. Brethren, bring Christ and His Heaven into your lives more and more. While you voyage over these dark waters let your anchor be cast within the veil. Even while you fight on in this stern day of battle, be patient and steadfast, and lift up your heads because your redemption draweth nigh. We are saved by hope, and above all hope by Christ in us, the Hope of Glory.

Christ Jesus bring us of His Grace,
Beyond all prayers our hope can pray,
One day to see Him face to face,
One day.

IX: THE HEAVENLY SOCIETY

IX

THE HEAVENLY SOCIETY

“Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven . . . and to the spirits of just men made perfect.”—Hebrews xii:23, 24.

IN the New Testament picture of heaven there is one face only which shines out in a clear light, the face of Christ. If we are asked where Heaven is and what it is, we can answer that it is where Christ is, and it is what Christ is. Yet the rest of the picture is not left in such depth of shadow as to convey no distinct message. As we look we begin to see, rising out of the background, the outlines of a glorious Divine Society. Everywhere the New Testament speaks of Heaven in terms of social life and intercourse. Most frequently, as here in my text, its chosen symbol is the City—the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. In the Bible, human life begins in the garden and under the simplest of social conditions, a man and a woman living their dual life as one. It ends in the city, the most highly developed form of the social organism, in which men have

the largest number of joint interests and can use the most complex cooperation for a common end. Let us think, then, of this heavenly society, taking this sentence from the Epistle to the Hebrews as our guide.

First, it speaks of angels, innumerable hosts of angels. We do not know much, nor do we think much, about the angels. But there are angels. Even if the Bible did not speak of them, we might be fairly certain that the Human Race is only a fraction, perhaps only a minute fraction, of the great family of God. There are in the Heavenly World other sons of God, whose experience has been widely different from ours, who have never worn the garment of flesh and blood, and have never fallen from their love and obedience. What shall be most gladdening and stimulating in intercourse with these elder sons of the Divine family, what we may learn from them who have never sinned, and what they may learn from us who have sinned and been redeemed, we cannot well conceive; but it opens up a vista of possibilities, wonderful though indefinable, that in the City of God we come to innumerable hosts of angels.

There is a second company in this great society, the general assembly and church of the firstborn whose names are enrolled in heaven, and the spirits of just men made perfect. I do not take time to expound these words minutely. By the "church of the firstborn" is meant the Christian Church; and by the "spirits of just men" the

saints of Old Testament times now at last made perfect by the death and resurrection of Christ. And again what an illimitable thought is here!—that great multitude, which no man can number, of those who from the beginning until now have been passing in ceaseless procession, and as the ages come and go will still be passing, through the valley of the shadow to brighter regions beyond. It were idle—utterly so—to speculate as to the mode or measure in which mutual intercourse may be realized among all the inhabitants of that spacious realm. Still it is not only justifiable but right to think of the noble company which, if Christ bring us thither, we shall find there—many whom it would have done us so much good to know as they were here, and whom it will do us so much more good to know as they are there, all the best and purest of our race, the saintly characters, the high spiritual intelligences, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, some whose story has reached us through dim tradition, some whose writings have inspired us to nobler lives and whom we have sometimes wished we could have known in the flesh. It is easy of course to give fancy a free rein in such a region, to picture a Milton reciting nobler poems than *Paradise Lost* to an audience “fit” and no longer “few,” or to imagine oneself taking courage to question St. Paul about some passages in his Epistles that are hard to be understood. But just one thing we may be sure of, that there no member of Christ’s

Body lacks any perfection, any real help or satisfaction, that can be ministered to him by the gift of any other member. No mere barriers of time or space can there limit the fellowship of those who are one in heart; nor, what is more important, any of those moral barriers which so often hinder its perfection here, no obstructing prejudice, no antipathy, jealousy, or selfwilled impediment to the commerce of mind and heart.

Think of the Christian Church as it is here and as it will be there. No sectarian names or badges or feelings in the General Assembly and Church of the firstborn; no imposed conformity, and as little any rampant nonconformity, no erecting of separate communions upon a scrap of ritual, polity or doctrinal formulation. They shall see eye to eye when the Lord bringeth again Zion.

Think of ourselves. How little we know of each other here! How seldom are we seen at our best in our intercourse. How seldom do we shew ourselves, and how seldom do we see others, in the most favourable light.—

We are spirits clad in veils,
Man by Man was never seen;
All our deep communion fails
To remove the shadowy screen.

But there the good are always at their best; and the words in which St. John describes the children of God here will there have perfect fulfilment; walking in the light as He is in the light, we shall have fellowship one with another.

So are we taught that in the Heavenly Kingdom God at last organizes the perfect social state, whose only law is love because love is all its life. There is no blessedness conceivable beyond this—a society of persons all united in perfect goodwill, where each communicates himself to all and all to each, where each seeks the joy and good of all, and each enjoys the joy and is enriched by the good of all. Such a society would be the *summum bonum*, the perfect organism of the perfect life, the Body of Christ. And such is the society the Spirit of Christ has begun to fashion and is slowly building up on Earth, and which is perfected in the fellowship of Heaven.

But when we speak of the Heavenly Society there is a hope that comes closer to our hearts than the sublime expectation of coming to innumerable hosts of angels or even to the spirits of just man made perfect. These we have never seen and have never lost. But there are those who have left, or will some day leave, desolate places in our own lives, who, though lost to sight, never pass out of our love and our heart's memory here. Meet the good and best of all ages! A far more poignant question to most hearts is, shall we meet again hereafter those we have loved best and who have best loved us? See the Apostle Paul! There is many a mother who in her heart of hearts knows that she would a hundred times rather see the little one taken from her arms; many a man would a hundred times rather clasp again the wife of his

youth than converse with the angel Gabriel. Are these longings and expectations fond and vain? Or are they in the light of the Gospel of God's Love solid and trustworthy? Will death, the passing to another realm of existence, make an end of our present personal relationships and create for us another and entirely new range and kind of associations, or will it immortalize and perfect all that is perfectible and capable of perpetuation in the loves and friendships of earth? In answer to these questions let us consider what certainties we have to go upon.

The first is that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, and that no relationships which are constituted merely by ties of flesh and blood or by secular association can be immortal. Even here such ties and associations may outlive their significance. Reunion is a second union, which implies a first; and we are not united, in any way to which the word "eternal" can be applied, by consanguinity. Union is not achieved by the *name* of relative. There is no reason why, and no means by which, relationships which are merely or mainly physical or conventional, whether of parent and child, brother and sister, or husband and wife, should be perpetuated in the Heavenly World, any more than those of merchant and customer, or master and servant. There, we may well suppose, the ideal counterpart of every right human relationship exists; but cer-

tainly not the reproduction of it as it exists on earth.

But when lives have become truly part of one another, and spirit has been knit to spirit in the communion of eternal life; where between husband and wife there has been the "marriage of true minds;" when a man has found the friend "that sticketh closer than a brother"; when as comrades in arms men have fought and suffered and prayed together in the cause of honour and righteousness, what shall we say? That these relationships have fulfilled their purposes on earth, and will find no place, because they would have no significance, in the society of Heaven; that we shall have altogether outgrown them and left them behind? Well, even concerning this some great Christian teachers have doubted. But the common Christian heart has always recoiled, and will always recoil, from the doubt. Who could then say, "O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy Victory?" The bereavements of death would still contain, even for the Christian believer, the hopeless sorrow of an eternal parting, and the sad inscription over the pagan tomb, "*vale, vale, in æternum vale,*" might still serve to utter the despair of our hearts. If we believe that God is Love, can we also believe that?

It may be said, however, that this feeling that the pain of separation can be solaced only by the hope of reunion, natural as it is, is groundless: that a perfect life hereafter is quite thinkable

without such reunion, and that indeed such continuation of the present into the future might, for aught we know, be a limitation and an impediment to the perfect life instead of a feature of its perfection. Well, I do not say that God could not give us a Heaven, and a perfect Heaven, without restoring to us all that has been fairest and best in our earthly life; but I say that the only way by which He could do so would be by making a complete severance between that life and this, by virtually making us altogether different beings, and giving us a life that should be, not the consummation of the life begun here, but simply an additional state of existence. Emphatically this is not the Christian idea of immortality. We do not carry into the life hereafter merely a character, a moral record and a destiny, existing in the consciousness of God; we carry thither our personal identity and our own consciousness of it. That is to say that one indispensable bond which links the self hereafter to the self here is memory. It is memory that guarantees our self-identity throughout the earthly life: it is because we remember that we know our past selves to be our present selves, the same however different. And so it must be in the hereafter. Much as we are ignorant of concerning the life within the veil, the survival of memory must be held as certain. Without that there could be really no *future* state: it would be the same as if we were anni-

hilated and a new race of beings created in our stead. Without that we could not even know ourselves to be the sinners Christ has redeemed, nor give to Him the praise. But if we carry memory with us, we must carry with us our affections and an inextinguishable longing for those whom we have bound to our souls by the chains of love, an unappeasable need of them for our completest bliss. And if it be said that this is not the question I maintain that it is the question, the very question. If we believe the Christian Gospel, that God is Love and that it is the necessity of His nature to do for His children all that love can do, and that Heaven just means that at last He is able to do this to the full, without let or hindrance, we may be sure that Heaven will not falsify this precious hope. Heaven may have nobler fellowships than the reunion of friends long parted; but there it is not as in this imperfect state, where the greater good has often to be purchased at the cost of the less. There at last *all things* are ours.

It is true that there is no express teaching in the New Testament to this effect; only, however, because it is everywhere taken for granted. Think, for example, of the words our Lord speaks to His disciples in the hour of farewell. "Let not your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house are many abiding-places. I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am there you may be also." How could

such words suggest to those brokenhearted men that one by one the bonds which knit them together in truest brotherhood would be forever dissolved, or how could they convey any other thought than that in the Father's house, after all earthly wanderings and separations, they should at last meet again, He and they together for ever? Or take St. Paul's tender words of consolation to the Thessalonians: "I would not have you ignorant concerning those which have fallen asleep, that ye sorrow not even as those who have no hope. For, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." These Thessalonians were expecting the coming of the Lord very soon and when some of their number died before that expected advent, they were sorely perplexed. They feared that they might never see their departed friends again. And the Apostle repeats to them the Master's assurance: Let not your hearts be troubled. They shall see them again, and that in the presence of their glorified Saviour. "Wherefore," he says, "comfort one another with these words." And what congregation is there in which there is not need of this comfort? One needs it to-day, another to-morrow. The Unseen is constantly opening its gates to receive those we love; but though they pass out of reach and out of sight, it is not for ever. As Browning's Pompilia says,

O Lover of my life, O soldier-saint,
No work begun shall ever pause for death.
Love will be helpful to me more and more
I' the coming course, the new path I must tread.

It is true of course that there are some things connected with the resumption of our relationships in the Heavenly Society which we cannot know and regarding which we can scarcely form even a conjecture. We leave this life at all stages of it; how does it proceed there? How do those who have departed in the last decrepitude of age become young again? How do the little children grow up in the nurseries of Heaven? You remember the fond lament of Constance over her boy foully done to death—

When I shall meet him in the courts of Heaven
I shall not know him; therefore never, never
Shall I behold my pretty Arthur more.

But we may be well content to leave such things, the time and the place and the manner of our meeting again with the All-wise. If he has inspired in our hearts undying affections, it is because we ourselves are undying, and because love is safe in His keeping, safe in that Father's house to which He bids us lift our eyes.

Some day, but not yet,
Somewhere, but not here,
God shall by thee set
Joys from each past year.

Light shall on the mountains
Clear shine after rain,
And the long-dried fountains
Well up fresh again.

'All things true and tender
Shall thine eyes behold,
In the new light's splendour
Fairer than of old.

And thy soul forget
Grief, remorse and fear—
Some day, but not yet,
Somewhere, but not here.

Let not your hearts be troubled. "We shall not need, like Joseph and Mary seeking the Child Jesus, to go wandering up and down the streets of that Jerusalem to seek our own among its 'solemn troops and sweet societies.' If we do not know where to find them, they will know where to find us." Are they not waiting for our coming, waiting to receive us into the eternal habitations?

But observe that our text says, not that we shall come, but that we are already come to this Heavenly Society, to Mount Zion and its Divine fellowship. Already we belong to it and breathe its atmosphere. There are not two families of God's children. As Charles Wesley writes in the sublimest of his hymns,

One family, we dwell in Him,
One Church, above, beneath,
Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death.

One Army of the Living God,
To His command we bow;
Part of His host hath crossed the flood,
And part is crossing now.

There is a world of inspiration for us in these thoughts. "One family, above, beneath"—then we must live as members of that family; we must learn not only to speak its language but to live by its spirit. "Part of His host hath crossed the flood." Yet they were once on this side, mortals and sinners like ourselves. But they trusted in God; they fought the good fight and laid hold of eternal life; they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Why should not we? "One army of the living God." They were weak as we, but strengthened from on high they came off more than conquerors. Why should not we? When we are weary and ready to be discouraged in the long campaign, let us listen to the shouts of victory which come from the other side of the stream, and be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. One day our warfare too shall be accomplished.

Some of you have more closely personal ties with the society of Heaven. Let it be the secret manna of your hearts, that while you find life sometimes solitary and hard, and stumble on in your lonely way, you can give thanks that your beloved have reached the goal, and that God has wiped away all tears from their eyes.

And in these closing hours of another year are there not voices that speak to each of us out of the Eternal World? Let us listen to them, as they remind us that it is Christ alone who gives eternal meaning to this brief, swiftly-passing life; as they bid and entreat us, now, if never before, to set eternal life before us as our goal and Christ before us as our way, to be heart and soul with Christ and with all who are trying to live and work for Christ; so that we may be at last with Him where He is, and with them where they are. And after all, as somebody has said, "Upstairs and downstairs are not so far apart." No, not so far apart, if only we are climbing.

X: IS EVIL ETERNAL?

X

IS EVIL ETERNAL?

“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.”—Revelation xxii:13.

THE question I wish to consider is this: Is evil destined to be eternal, or is there a final unity of all things in Christ? Existence, as we know it, is not a unity. It is cut in twain by a moral cleavage deep as the foundations of the universe, the antagonism between good and evil. And it is of the essence of the Christian faith that this antagonism is real. Moral evil is not good in the making. It is sin, that which absolutely ought not to be. But it is also of the essence of the Christian faith that existence began in unity. There are religions which carry back the tragic schism into eternity, which are founded on the belief that there is an original, self-existent principle of evil as well as of good. But Christianity entirely repudiates this explanation of the mystery of evil. “In the beginning God”—“Of Him and through Him and unto Him are all things.” Far as it has travelled and diverse as are the channels into which it has streamed, all existence has issued

from the Eternal Fountain, God. The question I put before you is: Will it return again to unity? As all the rivers come originally from the ocean and again flow into it, will all existence which has had its source in God, in like manner return to Him as its final goal? Or are good and evil destined to divide eternity as they now divide time? That is the question I am putting before you. I know very well that the Bible does not clearly answer it, and that neither you nor I can dogmatically answer it; but to consider it will, I hope, set some matters of very practical importance in a clearer light.

In the first place it is certain that evil does not terminate with the present life. "There may be Heaven, there must be Hell," says Robert Browning; and though the "may be" falls short of the truth, the "must be" does not go beyond it. There must be heaven, because the spirit that makes heaven is here on earth. And the spirit that makes hell is here also. The law of God in this and all worlds, a law absolutely just and absolutely inevitable, is that whatsoever a man sows, he reaps. If a man sows evil, the harvest is more evil. The supreme penalty of sin is more sin. We see how this fell sowing and reaping go on in this life. We see how sin puts out the eyes of the soul, destroys conscience, petrifies feeling, extirpates the capacity for pure and noble delights; tears out the very stops from the organ of man's moral nature. Do a wrong deed, and

though you flee on the wings of the wind, you cannot escape the penalty. For it is in yourself; the reward of the deed is in what you have become. And if we see this sowing and reaping in process here, we know that it must continue hereafter. The Christian conception of the future life has as its essence this, that it is the continuation and final completion and fruition of the life men live now. Death, the transition from this present state with its material conditions and limitations, will produce many changes in us which we cannot comprehend or even picture in imagination; but one thing it cannot do, make men radically different from their former selves, or change the direction in which their lives have been travelling. We have been studying the teaching of the New Testament as to what the "great change" will effect on one side of character. It will make the good man better; it will bring out vividly all the good that is in him, and set him free from all checks and hindrances, from all clinging imperfections and inconsistencies; it will make him wholly and for ever what he has longed and prayed and striven to be. And if it does this for the good man, what shall it do for the evil man but conduct him also to his goal? We know too little of the secrets of the future to be able to say what that goal is; but over the portals of eternity this is the inscription written: "He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still; and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still: and he that is righteous, let

him do righteousness still; and he that is holy, let him be made holy still."

Moral continuity, you see—that is what makes both heaven and hell. Goodness ruling at last with absolute unrivalled sovereignty, that is heaven. Evil ruling with unlimited despotism and unbroken sway, that is what we mean, or ought to mean, by hell. And it is an appalling thought that here may be sown the seed which bears its natural fruit in such a state.

But there are other reapings also from this sowing. From sin one does not only reap more sin; it is the everlasting ordinance that he shall reap misery also, that misery which is the inescapable result of the violation of the laws of his own being. If a man commits a sin, God does not hurl him over a precipice or fling him into a fiery furnace; He leaves him to the natural consequences of his own act. If his sin is of the body, if he is a drunkard or an opium-eater, it will make his nerves an engine of torture and reduce his mind to imbecility. And if the body is thus avenged, shall not the soul with its finer sensibilities be avenged sevenfold? Let no man doubt the fact of such retribution, a fact which is written so plainly on the laws of life. Most thoroughly, indeed, I dissociate myself from much that has been taught and believed on this subject. There is many a page in the writings of men whose names are inscribed, and deservedly inscribed, in letters of gold on the Church's roll of honour, which if I

were to quote to you and were to say that this is Christianity, you might be tempted to become infidels on the spot. The God these men speak of, you might say, is to me the devil. When, for instance, Jonathan Edwards speaks thus: "You cannot stand an instant even before an infuriated tiger; what then will you do when God rushes on you in His wrath?"—and I have chosen a mild example of the kind of imagery our forefathers indulged in—we can only be thankful that we live in a day when God is better understood, and the face of Christianity is no longer defiled by such unconscious blasphemies. In the name of Christianity I repudiate any idea of retribution except the working out of a moral necessity. "What maketh Heaven, that maketh Hell." And what makes both is this, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." That is the law of all worlds. As it has been said, "Only that retribution comes which must come; and all the retribution that must come comes!" And the essence of such retribution must be that whoever turns his back upon the life for which he is made, and which God offers him in Christ, becomes hateful to himself. Against all other punishments he might lift a defiant front; but against a self which has become its own punishment there is no appeal, and from it no escape.

That is our first truth: evil does not terminate with this life. Evil, impenitent and unvanquished, bears its fullest harvest in the life be-

yond. The next question necessarily is—will it ever terminate? Or is it eternal? Now I would remind you that when we speak of eternity we use a word the content of which we do not fully comprehend. We can say that eternity is what transcends time; that time passes, while eternity is that which does not pass. But while the words convey a meaning, it is a meaning we cannot clearly grasp. We know that eternity cannot be measured by the clock; yet unawares we begin to measure it by the clock, even when we say that it cannot be so measured. And, indeed, if we are to think of eternity at all, we must think of it as we can, as beings whose whole experience is conditioned by time. Our question, therefore, is: Does evil stand on the same footing as good? Is it everlasting, fixed and final as good? Or may we hold to the larger hope, that in some far-off final consummation all evil will be overcome by good, that, as all existence began in unity, it will end in unity, higher and richer than that in which it began? I shall have no dogmatic answer to give to that question. The Bible has no dogmatic answer. As it leaves the origin of evil, so it leaves the end shrouded in mystery. All I can do is to show where the *crux* of the question lies, and to declare to you the attitude of mind in which alone I find satisfaction and rest for myself.

Now the problem is commonly stated as that of eternal punishment. But that statement of it is to my mind superficial and misleading. The real

problem is that of eternal evil. Is sin destined to remain an indelible blot on the universe which is God's creation, and on the souls He has made in His own image? And when the question is so stated, our instinctive answer is that as a final result this is unthinkable. Did not God create all things out of His eternal, everflowing love? Did He not see the end from the beginning, and plan with infinite wisdom the creation to which His love gave birth? And is it conceivable that such a God should plan and make a universe in the midst of which there is to be eternally a great gulf fixed, in which evil, the thing He hates, which is contrary to His nature and will, is to have an everlasting abode? And the souls He has made—has He not said "all souls are mine"? Did He not foreknow their character and their history; and can we believe that He, so foreknowing, created any to be the subjects of everlasting evil and misery? Did He not deliver up His own Son for us all, and promise that He should see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied? And can the Christ-heart ever be satisfied, can He who wept over impenitent Jerusalem ever feel His work completed so long as even one soul is left in the thralldom of sin and in a world of woe? When we ask such questions, it seems self-evident that but one conclusion is morally possible. These things cannot be; it is inconceivable that they should. For, mark this: eternal evil means the defeat of eternal goodness, love and light. It means the

triumph of evil, its triumph in chains and darkness, but nevertheless its triumph. It means that God, being the Almighty, All-wise, All-loving Father we worship through Jesus Christ, has permitted evil to come into existence which is too strong and obdurate for all the remedial influences He can bring to bear upon it, which is able to offer an eternal resistance to His will. I feel, and I am sure you feel, that on this side the difficulty is insuperable.

And when we appeal to the New Testament, we find many utterances which point not to a drawn battle, but to a final and universal triumph of good. It is written that "of Him, and through Him, and unto Him are all things." It is foretold that in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of "things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth"; that by Him God will "reconcile all things unto Himself, whether they be things on earth or things in heaven;" and that in the "fulness of the dispensation of the times God will again sum up all things in Christ"; and again that in the end "God will be all and in all," and I might quote other passages to a like effect. Now I am far from saying that these passages contain a doctrine of universal restoration and salvation; but it cannot be denied that they point in that direction. That is what they naturally suggest; and if they, and the whole strain of thought in the New Testament which they represent, stood alone, that is unquestionably the sense

in which we should understand them. And this is to be observed, that whenever the New Testament writers think of the final destiny of mankind from that point of view—from the side of God's purpose, plan and sovereignty—such is the tinge which their utterances naturally assume.

Yes, if they stood alone, if there were no other point of view, there would be no uncertainty except as to the means by which final unity is to be brought about—if we had not to look at the problem from the side of man, if we had not also to take into account what sin is, and what sin can make of man. Sin is as antagonistic to the nature and will of God first as last, and yet sin has come into being; sin exists. Man is free; and even the Sovereign God can only stand at the door of our nature and knock. He cannot force the door without destroying the mansion; and when I ask myself by what means men may be turned from evil hereafter who refuse to be turned from it here, I find no reply. Will sin be less mighty? Is it the nature of sin to run its course like a fever and by and by exhaust its virulence? Rather do we see, as I have said, that sin tends to beget more sin, becomes more deep-seated and ineradicable, so that in the natural course the bad man becomes steadily worse and the godless man more godless. There is nothing in the nature of *sin* that offers any hope. Nor can there be another and more powerful *gospel* hereafter. There is no stronger moral influence than that of love; no vaster, purer

love than that which is in Christ, no greater thing the love of Christ can do through endless ages than has been done in the sacrifice of Calvary. God has given His utmost and made His final appeal in His crucified Christ. There can be no better Gospel. It were high treason to Christ to permit the fancy.

It may be said, however, that the retributions of the future will have a powerful influence in leading men to repentance. I admit the possibility, but not the necessity. When men sin because they know not what they do, because they fail to realize that what they do to others is so far from what they would that others should do to them, retribution in the strictest sense of the word may wonderfully open their eyes. It might, one imagines and hopes, be applied to the German people and their rulers with a very wholesome effect. When there is anything of a right spirit within, suffering often is an instrument of marvellous efficacy for its awakening and development. But so far as I know anything of human life I deny that suffering is ever in itself a power to make any one morally better. It acts on men according to their nature. It makes them more sympathetic or more selfish, patient or impatient, according to what they are. It brings the godly man nearer to God, and it confirms the atheist in his atheism. There is no inherent efficacy in suffering to produce a moral change and turn a man's innermost self from evil to good.

And finally I ask, will the grace of God, the power of good to overcome evil, the power of God's loving Holy Spirit, be stronger hereafter than here? That cannot be. Men speak of a "second chance." Will there be a second chance? Yes, and a third chance, and a thousand chances. Of that I am sure as that I stand here; and I do not comprehend how any one who believes in the God of Christianity can doubt that, if hereafter any soul should yield and repent, then even in the outer darkness he will see the light of God's Face, will find a knocker left for him on the door of mercy. It is of the essence of the Christian Gospel that the one and only condition of forgiveness is repentance. That condition is universal. It does not lapse with time. It cannot hold good in one world and not in another. God does not change His nature; and Eternal Fatherhood can never cast out the penitent. The question is not as to the *opportunity* of repentance either now or hereafter, but only as to its *possibility*. And what reason is there to exclude that possibility hereafter? Many depart this life regarding whom it cannot be said that they have reached any fixity of character for good or evil. Who can tell, indeed, when or how fixity of character for evil is reached? The very pith of our Gospel message is that we are not to regard it as reached by any one in this life. It bids us despair of no man, but hopefully call all to repentance: for "while the lamp holds on to burn, the greatest sinner may

return." And when does the lamp of life cease to burn? If to-night on my way home I were to be run over by an automobile and killed, surely the lamp of my life would not be extinguished. The "lamp" is not the fleeting breath, but the soul, the conscious moral personality. And there is no reason in the nature of the soul why the fact of physical death should of itself suddenly produce an irredeemable fixity of character, and seal moral destiny for ever. And if there is no reason in the nature of the soul, be assured, brethren, that there is no reason in the nature of God. If the prodigal's famine of happiness does not come to him here but hereafter, and if then he comes to himself, our whole Christian faith bids us be sure that he will find the Father's embrace around him.

Yet this does not carry us all the way to a final unity. If physical death does not fix as little does it unfix character. The constant tendency, as we everywhere see, is toward fixity; and if there are those who can resist God to the last in this life, what reason is there to believe that in another life, where they reap in greater fixity of character the fruit of their sowing here, they will not be capable of resisting Him for ever? I must confess that on this side also we are met by a solid wall through which no issue into a final unity is visible. And, further, it is on this side of the matter that the Gospel throws the full weight of its testimony and of its pleadings and warnings.

It speaks of irremediable loss, of a great gulf fixed, of a "too late," of an accepted time and a day of salvation which is now, of a Spirit sent to convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment, whose word is only of a "to-day" in which He calls men not to harden their hearts. If on the one hand the New Testament speaks sometimes of a universal Kingdom of God and a complete triumph of reconciling love, not once, on the other hand, does it shed any ray of light upon the future of the impenitent sinner. It sets the present before us as the crisis of our fate, and gives an "aspect of finality to the spiritual choices of this life."

To sum up, the question of eternal evil raises in its acutest form, and carries to its last issue, the insoluble antimony of the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. All comes back to this. The nerve of the problem is here. On the one hand the Scriptures reveal to us a God whose loving purpose is almighty and sovereign, who can open the heart that seems trebly locked and barred against good, who can "persuade and enable" the most sinful to turn unto Him; and our own faith and experience affirm the truth of this. On the other hand, scripture and experience assure us equally of our own freedom, of a boundless power of choosing evil rather than good. And if the Bible does not reconcile, or attempt to reconcile, these great truths, you and I cannot.

For myself I refrain from dogmatism. I can-

not do otherwise. I dare as little deny that the grace of God will at last triumph over all evil as I dare affirm that the will of man may not offer to it an endless resistance. To pronounce confidently upon what shall be throughout the eternities, the ages of ages of God's unending life, during which also the soul of man is to exist—well, I marvel at those who imagine themselves able to do that.

I have set before you the difficulties of the problem, not the solution. But for myself I find one refuge in all these perplexities; and to it I would direct you also. That refuge is Christ. "He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." For me that is enough; it is everything. He will be satisfied. He who is the Creator and Redeemer of men, who loved men unto the death, who more than watchers long for the morning longs for the multitudes of earth to come unto Him, who is everlasting, changeless Love—He will be satisfied in the ultimate issue of His work of creation and salvation. I cannot say, I cannot see, anything more than that; I do not want to say or to see more than that. He will be satisfied. In this I can entirely rest. Here I can lay down the burden of all my perplexities. He will be satisfied, when or how we know not; but that He will be satisfied makes it infinitely certain that the furthest future can disclose nothing that will not display, beyond all we can

ask or think, the perfect love and righteousness, power and wisdom, of the Everlasting God.

But the present now is ours. Duty knows no future. Wisdom finds too much to regret in what is already past, and knows no salvation except that of the irrecoverable to-day, too precious to be spent in vain.

XI: ETERNAL LIFE

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ETERNAL LIFE

“And the witness is thus, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life.”—1 John v:11, 12.

LIFE! Eternal life!—God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son—this is the message of the Christian Gospel, the greatest, gladdest of all messages because eternal life is the greatest, gladdest and best of all things. But what is *eternal* life? Throughout the course of sermons which this evening I bring to a close, I have been speaking of eternal life as the great Hope set before us; but though I have been speaking of it as perfected hereafter, I have endeavoured to keep steadily in view the continuity of the life that now is with that which is to come, and to exhibit them, not as two lives, but as one life in its two stages of sowing and reaping, growth and consummation. But I desire to make that specifically my subject this evening; and therefore I have taken my text from St. John. It was given to St. John to see, as no one before him had seen quite so clearly, that there is only one true life for man, here or hereafter, on the earth or in the sun. One of his

immense gifts to the Church and to mankind is his insight into the truth that eternal life is not a life hereafter, not a future and distant felicity, not a crown to be received at the end, but a present reality, an immediate possession. It is not primarily a length of life, but a kind of life, the highest quality of life and, as I have said, the greatest, gladdest and best of all things. Often, indeed St. John speaks of it simply as "the life," as if there were no other life to be mentioned beside it, or worthy of the name.

For life is not measured by the clock, not even the physical life. If a man had just physical vitality enough to exist, to keep decomposition at bay and hold body and soul together, though he should prolong such an existence through many years, he would know less of what physical life is than a healthy child in the space of one joyous summer-day. And there is a corresponding difference in the life of mind and spirit. The sage has a larger life than the clown; the poet is more alive than the man whose energies flow out merely that money may flow in; the man who loves his fellowmen and lives to serve them is really more alive than the man whose endeavour is to make others serve him; the man who strives to be wise and good than the man who seeks only to be so reputed. And eternal life is the highest grade of life, the life that has in it all the sovereign elements—knowledge, love, joy, power—for which we are made, life that is eternal and inexhaustible

in its meaning and value. After all, brethren, that is the one grand argument for immortality—a life here that not only has meaning for three score years and ten, but is worth living for ever and ever, that demands the completions of futurity. It is the eternal life in us now that reaches out to the eternal life to come.

Let us then, in the first place, grasp this thought about eternal life, that primarily it has nothing to do with present or future, or with length of duration. You cannot raise the level or change the character of any kind of existence by merely prolonging it. The life of a horse or a dog, though it were spun out for centuries, would never become the life of a man. And no more could the life of a worldly man, though it were continued without end, become eternal life. No, though he should be clothed in purple and fine linen and fare sumptuously every day for ever and ever, such existence would come never a whit nearer to being what the New Testament calls eternal life.

In the next place, we ask, What is this eternal life? What is its definition? How shall we describe this life which is eternal in its meaning and value? There is only one adequate description of it—deeper than all philosophic thought, which yet a child may understand. Eternal life is the life of Jesus Christ. Turn to the second verse in the first chapter of this Epistle and read these words: “And the life was manifested, and we have seen it, even the eternal life which was with the Father

and was manifested unto us.” There is its definition. The life which is eternal, the greatest, gladdest, divinest of all things, is the kind of life which we see in Jesus Christ. Everything He was and did possessed eternal meaning and value. Every word of grace and truth He spoke, every deed of holy love He did, when He touched the leper, when He fed the hungry, when he opened His heart to the sinful and weary with all their sins and cares, when He rejoiced in spirit and when He wept, when in obedience to the Father’s will He took up His cross daily and when He gave Himself in love for the life of the world,—every step was an unfolding of the eternal life. Measured by years Christ’s life was short. You can easily count its days and hours; a school-child could soon tell you how many minutes there were between Bethlehem and Calvary. But life is not measured by the calendar. Who would exchange an hour of glorious, soul-filling human life for all the centuries of an earth-worm’s existence? And who would not rather live one day of Christ’s life than all the long years of a Methuselah? Measured by circumstances Christ’s life was a poor life, a small life. A cottage home, a country village, a carpenter’s bench, a year or two of itinerant preaching, a shameful death,—these were its boundaries of circumstance. But who would not rather have done one of Christ’s deeds than possess the gold of all the millionaires? What can express the worth of one hour of that life? The

sea may be fathomed, the earth may be weighed and measured; but what mathematics can calculate the magnitude of the holiness of Christ; the faith of Christ; the sorrow of Christ; the peace of Christ. In what balance can you weigh the life of Christ or by what measure its length and breadth and height? "It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof." It is the life eternal; of eternal value, yesterday and to-day and for ever the supreme good, measureless, divine.

We may regard it for a moment from another point of view. Can we characterize this life which is in Christ? Can we tell what it is in a single word? I think so. It is the life of goodness, just of perfect goodness. "'Tis only noble to be good," Tennyson says. The poet might have gone further and said not only "noble" but "divine." For goodness is nothing else than the Divine nature itself, the Spirit of God, incarnate and expressed in man. And Jesus Christ is "God lived by man." His life is the life of God cast in the mould of our humanity, the life of absolute goodness. And the whole aim of Christianity is to make good men. Christianity stands or falls by its power to make men good; sober—good, that is, in relation to themselves; righteous—good, that is, in relation to their fellows; godly—good in relation to God. We sometimes speak as if Christians were some highly specialized sort of good men, as if the Christian character were a particu-

lar type of goodness. No. There is only one kind of real goodness, the goodness we see in Jesus Christ; and there is only one kind of really good men, those who are like Christ, who have in them the same spirit He had.

And so we are led inevitably to the further truth, that Christ is the touchstone of destiny for all man. "He that hath the Son," the Son of God, Jesus Christ, "hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." This follows because we have not that life in ourselves—that surely we all know—and because, not having that life in ourselves, neither can we produce it in ourselves. "Self-knowledge, self-reverence, self-control," says Tennyson again, "these three lead life to sovereign power." But he is wrong. That is the one thing self-knowledge, self-reverence and self-control cannot do—lead life to sovereign power. Self cannot raise self, any more than one up to the shoulders in a morass can extricate himself by the writhings and contortions of his own muscles. Archimedes used to say that he could move the earth, if only he had a lever long enough and a place outside the earth to stand upon. In morals the same impracticability is the dead wall which all attempts at mere self-improvement are brought up against. You cannot yourself make yourself really other than you are. If you are to lift yourself to a higher plane of life, a helping hand must be stretched out to you. You can be elevated only from above.

He that hath the Son hath life. Not self, but Christ—not self-knowledge, self-reverence, self-control, but Christ-knowledge, Christ-reverence, Christ-control—these lead life to sovereign power. You cannot get goodness except from goodness. You cannot get the Divine Spirit except from the Divine Man. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. Get possession of Christ, and your soul shall live, live the eternal life.

But you may ask what it is to *have* Christ, how such a connection with Christ is to be formed. For the construction of a railway—in India I think it was—a bridge was to be thrown across a mighty ravine, through which there flowed, far beneath, a deep and turbulent river. From shore to shore a strong iron bridge was to be hung aloft in the air. But how was it to be commenced? They first shot an arrow from one side to the other, and it carried across the gulf a tiny thread. The thread then drew a piece of twine; the twine a small rope; the rope a cable; and in good time came the great iron chains and the huge iron girders, and all else that was needed to make a permanent way. Something like that is our spiritual problem. Across that chasm which separates us from Christ and the life of perfect goodness we cannot at once construct the final and permanent way. But can we shoot some arrow of the soul across it? Some arrow of faith, of love, of desire? You may name it as you will, to be-

lieve on Christ, to love Christ, to desire Christ—all these lie very close together in the outgoing of the soul. And that this is what is required of us is the great commonplace of the Gospel. It is so very commonplace. If I were to give out as my text some evening, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," you would put on an air of resignation and prepare yourselves to listen to something very threadbare. Yet if one only *thinks* about it, how is this commonplace of the Gospel all lit up with wonder! Think how God meets us where we are able to meet Him, not demanding goodness of us, but enquiring only whether we have any heart for goodness, whether we believe in goodness as the "principal thing" and love it and desire it. Think further that this is the way of truth as well as of mercy. There is nothing fictitious or unreal about this way of salvation by faith. You and I are not just what we are; in deeper truth we are what we vitally believe in. The mark at which we shoot the arrows of the soul is the thing we are growing towards. If you believe in money as the finest thing in the world, that determines at once the kind of man you are going to be; if you believe in having a good time, you will grow to be a different kind of man; if in goodness, an altogether different kind of man from either. What you really believe in, what you surrender yourself to, is the index to what is deepest in you, the clue to all your potentialities. And that is what makes Christ the

Judge of men, the supreme test, the touchstone of destiny. That is why God's final question is, Do you believe in Christ? Do you believe in the Christ-life? Do you above all things desire the life that is in Him?

It is possible to make this way of salvation by believing a very artificial thing. It is so if we think of it as a kind of arrangement or transaction, a kind of makeshift for real goodness. And, no doubt, theologians have sometimes explained it in that way, and Christian people sometimes think about it in that way. But they do not in their hearts feel it in that way. What is Christian faith—the faith that justifies, as St. Paul would say, or, as St. John would say, the faith by which we “have” Christ and get his life as our own? It is in the great simple words of Wesley's hymn just this—

“Thou, O Christ, art all I want,
More than all in Thee I find.”

That is God's test for you and me, the test of present character and future destiny. If you in your inmost soul believe in Jesus Christ, if your soul loves and desires Him, it is because the Eternal Life is stirring in you. It has been so ordered that there is nothing else in Christ to attract supremely. There is nothing to fascinate the carnal mind, no pomp of kingliness, pride of conquest or splendour of wealth. To the Jew, to the worshipper of wealth and power and social distinc-

tion, the Cross is ever a stumbling-block. If we go to Him in the interests of intellect and culture, or logic and eloquence, philosophy and artistic elegance, we shall find in Him the greatest of thinkers, the most masterly of reasoners and exquisite of teachers; but His true greatness lies in another sphere. To the Greek the Cross is foolishness. But when we go to Christ with a soul hungering and thirsting for righteousness, seeking after the life that is life indeed, His glory begins to dawn. And when we are awake to the reality of sin and the imperious necessity of redemption; when we feel the need of an infinite love to love us in our sin and love us out of it, a love that will have boundless patience with us and is capable of infinite self-sacrifice on our behalf, then Christ is transfigured before us. To the self-sufficient there is little beauty in Him that they should desire Him; but to the humble heart with its burdens and strivings, its fears and hopes and aspirations, His face shines as the sun and His raiment is white as light.

“Thee, O Christ, art all I want.”

That is God's test for you and me, the test of absolute truth, as well as of mercy. And it is a present test. We respond to it now; we cannot do otherwise. The day of destiny is now; and the touchstone of destiny is here. Judgment does not wait for any dramatic grand *finale*. You and

I are secretly, and silently taking our places. We are now standing on the right hand or the left of the Judge. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. It will be seen hereafter where we stand; but now, not then, is the crisis; now, not then, is the testing hour. How do we respond to God's test? You young people, have you found the magnet of your lives in God's Son? Or are you so occupied with secularities, things innocent in themselves, it may be, or even praise-worthy, that you have no heart for the life eternal? It may be so. Thousands about us are spiritually dead. They have withered from the top; so far as their highest being is concerned they walk the streets in their shrouds. And you too may wrong your highest possibilities until the eyes of the heart are darkened, until the power of belief in eternal things is decayed and the supreme faculties of the soul, made for God and goodness, are paralysed, perhaps beyond recovery. There is only one salvation from this fate: "I when I am lifted up, will draw all men unto me!" He is the true magnet of your life, let Him draw you. Bring yourself within the range of His influence; think of Him; give heed to Him; be in earnest and deal sincerely with Him and with yourself, until you say, "Thou, O Christ, art all I want." By and by you will add, "More than all in Thee I find." He is all you want, if you but know it, all for this life and all for that which is to come.

Some years ago, before I left Scotland, there was a dreadful accident in a coal-mine, by which a large number of miners were imprisoned in its depths. The ordinary ways of entrance to the mine were so blocked that weeks must have elapsed before they could be cleared. But a plan was found. A bore was driven vertically through the rock to where the entombed miners were known to be; and through the narrow aperture air, food and light were let down to the starving and half-suffocated men, who then, themselves refreshed, carried the gifts of life to their fellows who were still more deeply buried in the recesses of the mine. Afterwards, a wider shaft was blasted out, through which the men themselves were drawn up into the world of light and safety, beheld the faces of their rescuers and friends, and were restored to the homes they had feared never to see again. It is an illustration, however rude and imperfect, of the communication Christ has opened between Earth and Heaven. He has sunk the bore, as it were; He has pierced the obstruction. He has opened the way; not yet the way by which we may finally rise to the life eternal, but the way by which it may descend to us. We see not yet His face; but He speaks to us words of immortal hope. He lets in some beam of the Eternal Day upon our lives, some breath of the Divine atmosphere. He sends down to us the Living Bread of which if a man eat he shall never die. Let us eat of that bread, and live by that

light, and hand on these means of life to others who are within our reach. Then by and by He will open to us that wider exit through which we shall be delivered at last from all darkness and dangers, and shall see our Saviour face to face,



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